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Major challenged over threat to children ■ Third of schools ban beef ■ Cattle prices slump

Europe bans British beef

CHRIS BLACKHURST
Westminster Correspondent

A Europe-wide ban on British beef started last night as consumers and their governments digested Britain's admission of a possible link between beef and CJD.

France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Portugal and Sweden closed their borders to British beef and others were considering following suit.

Germany said yesterday it wanted the EU to order a total ban. European Commission experts held an emergency meeting in Brussels with Britain's assistant chief veterinary officer, Kevin Taylor, to gather more details of the new evidence that eating beef infected by BSE, or mad cow disease, could lead to the potentially fatal Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease in humans.

The European Commission sought to play down the risk to consumers, pointing out that since 1990, when EU wide curbs were first agreed, it had "erred on the side of caution".

The rules, a spokesman said, were drawn up "in anticipation of a possible link between BSE and Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease". These require exports from Britain to be free of offal and nervous tissue; to come from herds free of BSE for at least six years and from animals younger than 30 months at the time of slaughter.

But as the Government continued to play a straight bat to Opposition pressure for a definitive statement on whether it

was safe for children to eat beef, ministers made clear that the Government would go to the European Court of Justice, if necessary, to outlaw the overseas bans. After Douglas Hogg, Minister of Agriculture, said a French suspension was "probably illegal", Whitehall sources indicated they would be asking the European Commission in the first instance to order the suspension to be lifted.

At Prime Minister's Question Time in the Commons yesterday, Tony Blair challenged John Major over the dangers to chil-

dren of contracting CJD from infected beef. The Prime Minister noticeably stopped short of saying it was safe to continue feeding them beef.

More than one third of Britain's 30,000 schools no longer serve beef to pupils. Yesterday the number of education authorities banning beef almost doubled.

Stephen Dorrell, Secretary of State for Health, is expected to make a statement in the Commons on Monday about the risks to children, after SEAC, the independent committee of

experts on BSE, has met this weekend.

The minister, asked about yesterday's revelation in the Independent that its health experts had considered recommending the destruction of the 11.8 million strong national herd, admitted the Government would be prepared to take this drastic step, if necessary. The cost of such action could run to £20bn.

As beef prices fell heavily at markets and shares in food companies on the Stock Market also dipped, Labour accused Mr Dorrell of "failing to come clean" about BSE. Alan Milburn, Shadow Health Minister, said Mr Dorrell had failed to disclose all the options his advisers had been considering.

"We should be told what options were considered by SEAC, which options were rejected and why, whether the Government believes it is safe to continue feeding beef to children. Public concern is so great, said Mr Milburn, that "ministers have a duty to be fully open about the considerations which have so far taken place behind closed doors."

Germany said it wanted the EU to order a total ban. European Commission experts held an emergency meeting with Britain's assistant chief veterinary officer Kevin Taylor to gather more details of the new evidence. The European Commission sought to play down any risk to consumers, pointing out that since 1990, when EU wide curbs were first agreed, it had "erred on the side of caution".



Gloom-looking cattle traders at Banbury auction market, Oxfordshire, where prices yesterday dipped by more than £100 a head. Photograph: John Voos

Ulster election plan sinks hope of ceasefire

DAVID MCINTYCK
and COLIN BROWN

Hopes for an early resumption of the IRA ceasefire plummeted last night as John Major's announcement of a new election produced a wave of anger among nationalists and republicans in Northern Ireland.

The complex arrangements for the elections on 30 May, together with the establishment of a new forum, were welcomed by David Trimble's Ulster Unionists and the Rev Ian Paisley's DUP. But they drew a furious response from Sinn Féin and John Hume's SDLP, despite a plea from Mr Major to Sinn Féin "not to walk away from the best chance of peace in a generation".

The British and Irish Governments had hoped the promise of all-party negotiations on 10 June would persuade the IRA army council to restore the ceasefire.

Mr Major said a hybrid system for electing a 110-seat forum to appoint the negotiating teams had been chosen because the parties had failed to agree on a single system.

Five seats in each of the 18 constituencies in Northern Ireland will be allocated from party constituency lists of

candidates, in proportion to each party's share of the vote. A further 20 seats will be allocated from the aggregate of the votes across Ulster, two each to the 10 most successful parties.

The nationalist position had been that no election was needed and if one was to be held it should simply produce negotiating teams, not a forum, which would inevitably have a Unionist majority. The SDLP also suggested a referendum for peace on both sides of the border. Mr Major's announcement came down against these points.

Martin McGuinness, of Sinn Féin, described the proposals as anathema. "This makes it all the more difficult to convince the IRA that there is a real case for a second cessation. The British proposals represent a blatant Unionist agenda," he said. John Hume, the SDLP leader, privately told colleagues the plan would make it more difficult to get the IRA to end the violence. The SDLP deputy leader, Seamus Mallon, condemned "a Monster Raving Loony election proposal".

But Tony Blair, the Labour leader, made it clear Labour would support the legislation for the elections, which is to be rushed through Parliament after the Easter recess.

Nationwide gun amnesty is ordered

JAMES GUSICK



Lord Cullen: Will report 'as soon as possible'

A nationwide guns amnesty, in the wake of the Dunblane massacre, could begin in a matter of weeks, the Prime Minister said yesterday.

In a brief Commons statement, John Major said that the Home Secretary, Michael Howard, had been in discussion with the police and that "details" of how and when the firearms amnesty would take place were being worked out urgently. Mr Howard said he would like the amnesty to begin "as soon as possible".

Although a weapons amnesty has been under discussion by the Government since last July, the murder of 16 schoolchildren in

Dunblane, and the inquiry that will be carried out by Lord Cullen, have acted as catalysts for immediate government action. Yesterday the Secretary of State for Scotland, Michael Forsyth, announced the judicial inquiry's terms of reference.

The brief for Lord Cullen is wide, giving him powers to investigate the "circumstances leading up to and surrounding" the mass murders on 13 March.

With Lord Cullen told to "report as soon as practicable", the timetable for the amnesty - if it goes ahead within weeks - will be operative as the Dunblane Inquiry gets under way. The Dunblane shootings and the public's call for action by the authorities have clearly accelerated the Government's plans for an anticipated amnesty.

Estimates of illegally held guns in Britain vary from 500,000 to more than 1 million.

In the last guns amnesty, introduced in 1988 as a consequence of the Hungerford massacre where 16 people were shot, 48,000 firearms were surrendered. The amnesty which followed, according to the Home Office yesterday, was organised within a few weeks of being announced. In a similar scheme in 1968 25,000 guns were handed in.

Mr Forsyth said the inquiry will follow the procedures which operated in the Aberfan Inquiry. The inquiry in Wales looked at the causes of the

deaths in 1966 of the 116 children and 28 adults killed when a coal slag-heap collapsed and covered a school.

As recommended by Lord Cullen, the Dunblane Inquiry will take evidence on oath and will be conducted under the Contempt of Court Act 1981. Mr Forsyth told the Commons the reference would be: "To inquire into the circumstances leading up to and surrounding the events at Dunblane Primary School on Wednesday 13 March 1996, which resulted in the deaths of 18 people; to consider the issues arising therefrom; to make such interim and final recommendations as may seem appropriate; and to report as soon as practicable."

The Government hope to submit its evidence on gun control to Lord Cullen's inquiry by the end of next month. Mr Howard will also conduct a review of firearms controls in Britain. The government has invited the Home Affairs spokesmen from the opposition parties to meet them and raise any issue they would like to see the review address.

In Dunblane yesterday funerals of those killed in the massacre continued. In the cathedral a service for the teacher Gwen Major was held. Parents of some of the dead and injured children, and some of the injured children from Mrs Major's class, also attended the service.

British bookies take sumo into cyberspace

RICHARD LLOYD PARRY
Tokyo

A British-based bookmaker has taken to cyberspace to help the gambling-crazy Japanese overcome draconian betting laws which forbid bets on top sports from sumo wrestling to football. SSP International Sport Betting, which has made £25,000 a week from telephone and fax wagers placed by Japanese punters since it was set up in 1989, is expecting its new Internet service to attract more than 1,000 customers a day.

The service looks like a sure win — the Japanese spend more on the sports they are allowed to gamble on than any other nation. Betting on horse-racing is four times that in Britain, and total spending in 1993 was a total of 27tn yen, nearly 6 per cent of gross national product. Two-thirds of this goes on pachinko, a strangely addictive Japanese version of pinball.

But restrictions leave Japanese gamblers with little choice of where to place their money — apart from a small-scale lottery, betting is confined to bicycle, motorbike, speed-bout and horse-racing with wagers placed on the day with a handful of bookies run by sports associations. The great national passions, sumo, baseball and soccer, as well as casinos, are strictly off-limits.

It is this gap that SSP is hoping will lead to a big pay-day — if it is allowed to. Following a test run on the Internet last week the Japanese National Police Agency launched an investigation. SSP is based in London, but takes bets solely from overseas.

Of the 16 languages on offer, including Finnish, Chinese and Thai, Japanese is by far the most lucrative. Eleven bookmakers, including one Japanese, set the company's odds.

Favourite bets at present are the high-school spring baseball tournament, the outcome of the Oscars, and the ferocious battle between Japan and South Korea to host the 2002 World Cup (Japan is the favourite at 10 to 7 on).

But the Japanese police are interested. "Recently the Internet has been proliferating

and there is much discussion of the problems that accompany it," a police spokesman said. "This case is just one of them, and we are giving it our attention."

Eric Sedensky, who lived in Tokyo for eight years before becoming SSP's Japan development manager, said: "It is totally ridiculous. If we set up on a street corner in Tokyo we'd be arrested in a moment. But we're based in the UK, the bets are received in the UK, and they're made in cyberspace. That's it."

IN BRIEF

Chinook crew 'cleared'
The crew of the RAF Chinook helicopter which crashed in the Mull of Kintyre in 1994 killing all 29 people on board were not necessarily to blame for the accident, an enquiry report is expected to reveal. Page 5

Today's weather
Misty and overcast with some showers. Section Two, page 37



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Mackay seeks way to halt stalkers

JOHN RENTOUL
Political Correspondent

Lord Mackay, the Lord Chancellor, is discussing a new law against stalking with ministerial colleagues – in response to criticism of the law for failing to protect women whose lives are made a misery by men who pursue them obsessively.

Lord Mackay is believed to have floated the idea of extending "non-molestation orders" to cover cases of stalking. This would allow victims to obtain orders against unwanted attention that a court is satisfied they find intimidating.

At the moment there is no law against watching and following people, or sending them unwanted letters, flowers or gifts. Stalkers can only be prosecuted for breaches of the peace, or threatening, abusive or insulting behaviour – in which case it must be proved that they acted with intent to cause harassment and alarm.

The maximum penalty for intentional harassment is six months jail and a £5,000 fine, but police say they are handicapped by the difficulties of proving intent.

The Family Law Bill, currently going through Parliament, provides for "non-molestation orders" against people connected by family or domestic relationship. A source close to Lord Mackay said: "This could be a way of dealing with stalking more generally."

The orders can specify the type of molestation in question. They are a civil rather than a criminal remedy, but they could give the police the power of arrest in cases where they are breached.

Minister have already signalled their willingness to legislate against stalking and the Home Office is examining the options, including looking at laws in Australia, Canada and the US, where stalking is a crime. A man who stalked the pop star Madonna was recently jailed in California.

Home Office sources say that Lord Mackay's plans may not go far enough for Michael Howard, the Home Secretary, who may prefer to make stalking a crime.

But Labour claims that the Government voted down an opposition move to make stalking an offence in 1994, and failed to provide parliamentary time for a private member's Bill brought in earlier this month by Janet Anderson, Labour MP for Rossendale and Darwen.

She told the Commons: "British women who have been stalked are frustrated by the inadequacy of British law. And while the targets of obsession go on suffering, police officers are frustrated and angry with the absence of a specific offence of stalking."

Chinook crash inquiry set to absolve pilots

CHRISTOPHER BELLAMY
Defence Correspondent

The crew of the RAF Chinook helicopter which crashed in the Mull of Kintyre killing all 29 people on board were not necessarily to blame, the report of the inquiry into the accident is expected to reveal today.

A Ministry of Defence investigation into the crash on 2 June 1994, which killed 25 military and civilian anti-terrorist experts, blamed the accident on the negligence of the four-man crew.

But the fatal accident inquiry report, and due to be published this morning, will say it is unable to determine the cause of the tragedy.

The accident killed many of the key figures in the fight against terrorism in Northern Ireland, including the army's head of intelligence in the province, senior RUC officers and several members of the Security Service, MI5. They were en route from Belfast's Aldergrove airport to a conference in Scotland when the US-built Chinook helicopter slammed into a mountainside, killing all on board.

The report of the 18-day fatal accident inquiry held in January this year, which was chaired by Sir Stephen Young, the Sheriff of North Strathclyde, is to be released in Paisley this morning.

The inquiry is broadly equivalent to a coroner's inquest in England and Wales and its findings are not binding on the MoD or the RAF. However, it is likely to prove embarrassing for the MoD because it is expected to contradict the findings of their official inquiry published on 25 June last year.

The latter concluded that the pilots, Flight Lieutenants Jonathan Tapper and Richard Cook, were negligent because they continued to fly towards the high ground of the Mull of Kintyre in unsuitable weather conditions.

The weather forecast at the time of take-off from Northern Ireland was suitable for the route flown but the weather deteriorated during the approach to the Mull of Kintyre.

RAF personnel were also witnesses at the Sheriff's inquiry, which it is understood concluded they could not be blamed. The pilots' families have accused the RAF of making them scapegoats for the crash.



New destination: A collection of historic railway posters, which lay undiscovered for many months in a property in East Anglia, was auctioned by Onslow's at Carlsbrooke Hall, London, yesterday

Labour to take tougher stance over Railtrack

DONALD MACINTYRE
and COLIN BROWN

Labour will commit itself to a state stake in Railtrack, after differences over its post-privatisation future were resolved in favour of a tougher than expected commitment to public ownership.

Although the exact wording of Labour's intention to run a publicly owned and accountable Railtrack has yet to be finalised, the policy – which is expected to be included in next month's privatisation prospectus – was agreed in substance at a meeting of key Labour figures on Wednesday evening.

The wording is expected to make it clear that the public interest in Railtrack will not be restored until resources allow. But the language will leave no doubt over its overall goal and will be formulated in way designed to create considerable uncertainty among would-be investors.

The approval of the Labour leader, Tony Blair, for the policy will be read by some in the Labour Party as a victory for John Prescott, the deputy leader, over Gordon Brown, the shadow Chancellor, who had originally argued that the public interest in Railtrack should be protected by regulation rather than ownership.

Mr Brown, however, is understood to have given his approval to the new railway policy.

Although party figures strongly deny the debate was polarised, Clare Short, the shadow Transport Secretary, was said to have at one time backed Mr Brown, while her deputy, Brian Wilson, the rail spokesman, supported Mr Prescott.

The statement of the new policy will make it clear that Labour is not committed to continue transferring rail subsidy to the rail network through the franchise operators.

Under Government policy the £2bn subsidy for passenger services will be paid to franchise operators who then pay Railtrack access charges for the right to use the network's infrastructure.

By reopening that issue, the party will raise the prospect of subsidising Railtrack directly – at the same time as letting the franchise operators be free of access charges.

Such a switch could also reopen the question of how the regulatory regime would operate.

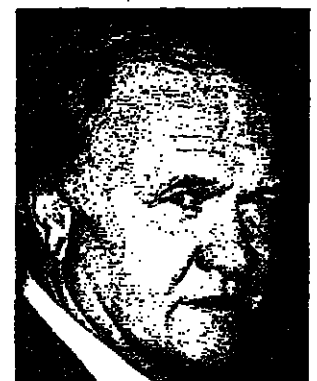
The prospectus for the £1.5bn flotation of Railtrack will be published next month and party officials believe that the inclusion of the Labour formula could well deter some would-be investors from coming forward.

There has been fierce debate within senior levels of the party over the kind of commitment to make on Railtrack. But Mr Blair is said to have been open-minded while seeking to ensure that there were no unacceptable costs involved.

Police in hunt for football gang

JASON BENNETTO
Crime Correspondent

Police are examining possible links between three robberies on prominent football personalities after the wife of Ron Atkinson, manager of Coventry City, was left handcuffed at her home overnight.



Ron Atkinson: Wife was left handcuffed

Interpol has been contacted about the possibility of a gang being responsible for robberies against famous people as far away as Australia. They were alerted after it was noticed the same method was used in the crimes. It involves attacking the man and handcuffing him, before making the wife show where the valuables are kept and then handcuffing her.

In the latest incident three masked raiders burst into the home of Maggie Atkinson, the wife of Ron Atkinson, near Bromsgrove, Hereford and Worcester, at about 9.30pm on Wednesday. Mrs Atkinson was forced to open the family safe and the robbers got away with cash and jewellery.

Before leaving they handcuffed Mrs Atkinson to the banister of the upstairs landing. She was not discovered until 12 hours later at 10.30am yesterday by a family employee. Mrs

Atkinson was described as "extremely distressed" but suffered no injury in the raid except for abrasions caused by the handcuffs.

Mr Atkinson said: "It has been particularly distressing, but fortunately Maggie is very resilient."

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Cancer doctor got job without any interview

NICHOLAS TIMMINS
Public Policy Editor

A regional health authority allowed a temporary locum consultant who made more than 80 major errors in diagnosing cancer and other diseases to be appointed without any other senior doctor interviewing him, an inquiry revealed yesterday.

Dr Sam Kiberu, a histopathologist who made 531 errors in diagnosing 4,226 cases, 83 of them classified as "major", worked at Grantham and Bassett hospitals in Lincolnshire and Derbyshire. His mistakes were uncovered by Dr David Clark, the consultant histopathologist who succeeded him at Grantham, and whose actions were commended by yesterday's inquiry.

Trent region appointed Dr Kiberu without a medical interview and despite his experience not matching that recommended in NHS guidance, the inquiry said yesterday.

And central funding for a quality assessment scheme which might help prevent such cases in future – or allow them to be detected earlier – has been ended by the Department of Health, the report revealed.

The report criticises both the Trent region and the two hospitals over Dr Kiberu's appointment, but says that despite "administrative shortcomings and weaknesses" there is "no evidence to conclude that these led directly to [his] inappropriate employment". It is possible that Dr Kiberu, a graduate of a Tanzanian medical school who had become a fellow of the Royal College of Pathologists in 1990, would have been appointed anyway.

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IN BRIEF

Legal aid bill over Sony court battle

A middle-aged German's legal bid to prove he invented the Sony Walkman will cost the British taxpayer £500,000 after his claim was thrown out by three Court of Appeal judges. Andreas Pavel, who spent a £1m inheritance battling the Japanese multi-national through the courts, had to fight the appeal on legal aid.

Teen drinking rises

Underage drinking is on the rise, with teenagers drinking more alcohol more frequently. Between 1990 and 1994 there was a "marked increase" in the number of pupils aged 11 to 15 who drank alcohol every week, said a survey of secondary schools by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys. Some were consuming the equivalent of four pints a week.

OAPs badly beaten

Two women pensioners, aged 90 and 76, were seriously ill in hospital after being savagely beaten by an intruder at a block of flats. The younger of the two may have lain bleeding with a fractured jaw for up to 17 hours at the complex in Barry, South Glamorgan. The 90-year-old had severe facial injuries. Police were hunting a man aged between 20 and 30 seen nearby.

Director quits

Carol Tietjen, personnel director of the former Yorkshire region of the NHS, has resigned her £44,000 post as Director of Human Resources at Oxford after damning criticism last week by the National Audit Office of her performance in her NHS post. She was accused of failing to declare an interest over contracts let to her husband.

Burns boy 'miracle'

A three-year-old boy who suffered 94 per cent burns in a fire which killed his mother is believed to have made British medical history by surviving for six weeks. Adam McKelvie's fight for life has amazed surgeons at Stoke Mandeville Hospital, Aylesbury, Bucks, where he had several skin grafts.

Hotel knife death

A British businessman has been knifed to death in a Chinese hotel room. The body of David Swindells was found in the Shangri-la Hotel, Shenzhen, on the China/Hong Kong border. Mr Swindells, 59, married with three children from Frinton Heath near Abingdon, Oxon, was a consultant with the United States based company Corning Inc, inventors of Pyrex.

Rev Niall Johnstone

Reporting evidence to MPs considering the forces' ban on homosexuals (20 March), we incorrectly referred to the Rev Niall Johnstone as a former army chaplain dismissed from the forces. The Rev Johnstone resigned as an infantry officer to train for ordination. We apologise for our error.

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Feel-bad factor predicted as population falls

DIANE COYLE
Economics Editor

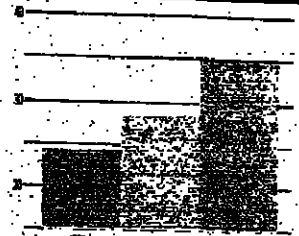
The Chancellor may be able to look forward to a revival in consumer spending this year but his counterparts in the next century will face a serious "feel-bad" problem. Levels of consumer spending will fall as the British population shrinks after about 2020, according to a new report by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

The housing market will be hardest hit, it predicts. A housing surplus will depress prices. This is likely to be reinforced by the inheritance of property bequeathed to their heirs by the first post-war generation of owner occupiers.

The regional differences will be pronounced, however. The population in East Anglia, the East Midlands, the South West and South East will continue to grow, at the expense of the North and London.

Presenting the report yesterday as part of the Department of Trade and Industry's contribution to Science Week,

Woman managers and professionals as % of all female employees



Professor Richard Scafe, of the University of Kent, said there were other economic and social trends anticipated in the next two decades which would mean profound changes in consumer markets.

Talking up the usefulness of ESRC-funded academic research as opposed to traditional market research, he said: "Businesses should take a step back and look at the social and economic forces that shape long-term consumer trends to enable them to anticipate these changes."

Other trends he highlighted included growing inequality of income, job insecurity, the age-

ing of the population, rising women's incomes, and the growing proportion of one-person households and single-parent families.

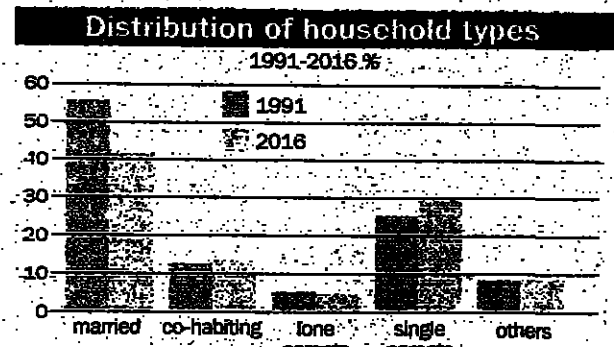
Some of these are already well-publicised. For instance, the proportion of over-65s in the population will increase from 20 per cent to 24 per cent between 2000 and 2021. During the next 15 years the number of consumers aged 50-65 will climb by 2.8 million to 11.6 million, while the number of 15 to 30-year-olds will be static. Businesses serving the elderly should thrive.

By the year 2000, a third of households will consist of one person - a high proportion of them elderly - buying goods and services for themselves. Lone parents will account for more than 11 per cent of all households. They tend to be poorer than average and to buy fewer of the household goods married couples furnish their nests with. The technological revolution is leaving them behind.

The consumer implications of other trends identified by Professor Scafe are less well-known. For instance there is likely to be a significant rise in the number of women in professional and managerial jobs. By 2000 more than a third of women employees will be in such posts.

The evidence from the United States suggests demand for labour saving devices, security measures and new services such as teleshopping and multimedia will expand as a result.

Job insecurity will favour products that are durable and functional. Luxuries and credit purchases could decline.



It's official, happiness is winning the jackpot

MARIANNE MacDONALD
Media Correspondent

Britain finally has an official answer to the hotly debated question of whether winning the jackpot on the lottery makes you miserable.

The question was posed yesterday by the Heritage Select Committee, which is investigating the lottery.

On the House of Commons stand were Ken Southwell, a communications engineer who won £239,000 as his share of the jackpot in the first lottery draw in November 1994, and Bob Westland, a postmaster who won £3.8m last July.

Toby Jessel, Tory MP for Twickenham, asked: "We were told that if people won big, it would make them miserable, wreck their lives and damage their family relationships. 'Has it made either of you miserable?'"

"The exact opposite," reported Mr Westland. "It made me very happy. It gave me security for life, and anybody who says they would be made miserable by winning doesn't know what they are talking about."

Mr Southwell said: "It hasn't made me happier, because I was happy before. It made me a lot more secure."

Both men said that they had had no problems with harassment from the press, even though Mr Southwell won the jackpot on the first week when media interest was at its highest. "In retrospect I was fairly naive in that I made the fateful mistake of showing the landlord of the village pub the ticket," Mr Southwell said. "The press got to me before Camelot did."

The worst thing which had happened as a result of his win was that he was in effect sacked. "I went back to work two days after the win [for TASS, a subsidiary of BSkyB] and I was quite happy to carry on. But I was shoved out. I think they questioned my loyalty. We're on a call-out system and I think they doubted I would get up if there was a blizzard and it was late at night."

The engineer from York has now bought several houses as investments and paid off his sister's mortgage. Mr Westland has sold his business and plans to buy a country-house hotel.

Neither had had any problem with jealousy or scoundgers, they said. "It has been the exact opposite," said the jovial Mr Westland. "I've had so many people come up and congratulate me."

Vitamin E 'cuts heart disease risk'

GLENDIA COOPER

Vitamin E can substantially reduce the risk of heart attacks - by as much as 75 per cent - according to new research by doctors at Cambridge University.

By comparison, aspirin, commonly taken by heart patients, provides a 25 to 30 per cent benefit.

The doctors who made the discovery believe this is why Mediterranean people have much less heart disease than northern Europeans.

A team led by Professor Morris Brown, from the Cambridge University Clinical School, studied 2,000 patients with heart problems. Half were given vitamin E in an 18-month trial, while the others took placebo tablets.

The doctors found that the number of heart attacks in the vitamin E group was only a quarter of that in the placebo group, according to research, published in tomorrow's issue of the *Lancet*.

Professor Brown said: "We're very excited. We didn't expect the effect on heart attacks to be so large. There has been a lot of circumstantial evidence of the benefit of vitamin E, but this is the first time anyone has come up with a clear-cut answer."

"Although it is early days, I will be recommending that patients with angina and those who are at risk of heart disease should be given supplementary vitamin E at a high dose."

Vitamin E is found in vegetable and fish oils. Olives,

olive oil, nuts, avocados and oily fish, like tuna and mackerel, all contain large amounts of the vitamin.

The *British Medical Journal* also carries further evidence for the benefits of alcohol against heart disease, and claims that a range of drinks, not just wine, has a protective effect.

Previous research has suggested that substances found in wine - particularly red wine - known as bioflavonoids, made it more effective than beer or spirits at reducing the risk of death from heart disease.

But American scientists who have reviewed major studies, say that all alcoholic drinks are linked with a lower risk.

Dr Eric Rimm and colleagues from the Harvard School of Public Health, Boston, reviewed a series of previous heart disease studies. Of 10 studies, four found a benefit from moderate wine drinking, four found the same benefit from beer, and four from spirits.

Another paper, written by Danish scientists and also published in tomorrow's *British Medical Journal*, found that tea- and coffee-drinking men with high levels of cholesterol had a five times greater risk of heart attack than those who consumed three or more alcoholic drinks a day.

Dr Hans Ole Hein and a team from Rigshospitalet State University Hospital, Copenhagen, studied 2,326 men aged 53 to 74. They found that the more cholesterol the men had in their blood, the greater was the benefit of alcohol.

Stocking answer to 'jet leg' swellings

Elastic stockings could solve the problem of swollen ankles on flights, according to a retired dermatologist, writes Glenda Cooper.

Jet flight leg has been attributed to passengers having to sit still for long periods and is usually treated by massaging and moving the legs. But in a letter to the *Lancet* medical journal, Sam Shuster suggests that the cause of the swelling is the low air pressure in the cabin.

Professor Shuster, a fellow of Newcastle University, said that oedema (swelling) is most common amongst those with varicose veins and women over 30.

It is usually noticed about three hours into the flight and varies from a slight ankle pitting to swelling of the lower leg.

He explains that if blood pressure remains unchanged but the pressure in the cabin is low then it will "suck" fluid out of the capillaries, creating swelling. "I have found the elastic compression stockings prevent the swellings completely in those with recurrent moderate or severe jet flight leg," he said.

The stockings need only be lightweight, below the knee and above the toe, but must be put on before the flight.



Branch manager: Wendy Foulger, of the Aberglasney Restoration Trust, Llandell, Wales, takes shelter in a 1,000-year-old yew tree tunnel, probably the oldest in existence. The trust is appealing for financial help to support its historic hall and grounds. Photograph: Rob Stratton

Mast sends wrong signal to Lloyd Webbers

STEVE BOGGAN

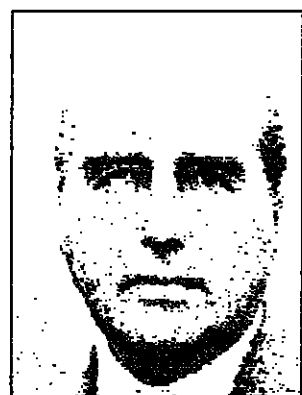
The man who funded the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb is buried there. De Havilland flew his first aircraft from there. And for centuries, bonfires have been lit there at times of national celebration and tragedy.

Beacon Hill is rich in history and beauty, the site of an Iron Age camp and no stranger to skirmishes. But no one could have foreseen its latest role in the field of human conflict - the subject of a row between Lady Lloyd Webber and Lord Carnarvon over a Vodafone communications mast.

Today, before blood can be spilled, Lord Carnarvon, grandson to the man obsessed with Tutankhamun, will try to resolve the row he inadvertently started when he gave Vodafone temporary permission to erect the 15m mast at the foot of the



Lines crossed: Lady Lloyd Webber (left) objects to a mast put up on land near her by Lord Carnarvon (right)



mission when it debates the matter next week.

"It is outrageous that the mast has been put up in an area of outstanding natural beauty," said Lady Lloyd Webber.

"Planners don't seem to care what they allow to go up. I've already written to the council objecting to the scheme. I'm astonished that Lord Carnarvon and the council have given the [temporary] go-ahead for it."

After realising the extent of opposition to the mast - the council has received eight complaints - Lord Carnarvon moved last night to defuse the situation and said he is determined not to let the upset turn into an argument.

"I had a meeting with Lady Lloyd Webber two weeks ago and it was very amicable," he said. "No one is more aware of the importance of the site than I am - my grandfather is buried there. But I think we have to

strike a balance between what the public needs in the form of better signals for their telephones, and what we all feel about the area."

"I have been away, but when I got back yesterday and learned of the strength of feeling, I got in touch with Vodafone and I'm having a site meeting with a director and an engineer tomorrow to see if it can be moved to a better spot and reduced in height by 3 metres. It turns out that they need it to service the south of Newbury, so it doesn't need to be high on a hill."

He confirmed that he would receive rent from Vodafone for allowing the mast on his land, but declined to say how much.

Mike Caldwell, a spokesman for Vodafone, said: "These sites can be very expensive and intrusive. We want to do without them, but we had no alternative."

Arsonist is given six life sentences

A barman who murdered a mother and her five children by setting fire to their fourth floor flat, was given six life sentences at the Old Bailey yesterday.

Judy Newell, 35, and her children were said to have "screamed and screamed" as fire engulfed them at their flat in Bermondsey, south London.

The court was told Scott Vowles, 24, set the fire, but the Newells had not been his target - he had wanted to settle a trivial argument with Mrs Newell's brother who, unknown to him, had moved out. Mrs Newell and her family had only been living in the flat for two days.

Vowles, of Bermondsey, had denied six charges of murder. But the jury found him guilty on a majority verdict.

One witness described the family as "looking like burning ghosts" as they perished. Mrs Newell, her children, Courtney, seven, Curtis, three, Nathan, one, and Cassandra, six, died in the blaze in January 1995. Ashley, four, survived the fire but died later in hospital. Neighbours implored the mother to jump and throw down her children. They had mattresses and blankets ready to catch them.

After the jury convicted Vowles, police revealed he was a persistent firebug who was linked with fires at previous addresses but had never been prosecuted.

Vowles had trapped the family by placing a burning mattress outside the bedroom door. "To cause maximum devastation Vowles turned on four gas burners on the hob and turned the gas oven on," Richard Horwell, for the prosecution, said.

The arson attack was prompted by a trivial domestic row about untidiness and unpaid bills. Vowles was plotting his revenge against Mrs Newell's brother, Lee Newell, whom he had shared the flat with before moving out. But Lee Newell had given up his room to his sister and her children who had nowhere to stay after leaving the children's father.

On the night of the killing Vowles and his dog were seen outside the flats by witnesses.

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THE BSE RISK

Research on risks to young may take years

CHARLES ARTHUR
Science Correspondent

Scientists fear it will be impossible to give definitive guidelines on whether children can safely eat beef or its products without fresh experimental evidence, which could take months or years to produce.

But experts in the field of "mad cow disease", or BSE, and its equivalent forms in other species, believe that as long as BSE exists in cattle there will be a faint but real risk that it might somehow be passed on to humans.

"We believe that if there's now any risk to children, then it must be on about the same level as that of crossing the road," said a member of SEAC, the independent advisory committee to the Government on BSE and its human form, Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (CJD), yesterday.

"The point is, for adults the principal risk is all in the past, from the time before all the regulations [on what parts of cows could be used for food] were changed. Any future risk to us is trivial in comparison to those in the past. But for a baby born

CHILDREN'S DIET

yesterday, the risks are all in the future. The equations are all different for babies and children than for adults."

A number of scientific experiments are now in progress to test how infectious BSE might be to humans. One, using mice with human genes, produced preliminary results last December which suggested that it was not. But the experiment needs another year at least to produce a final result.

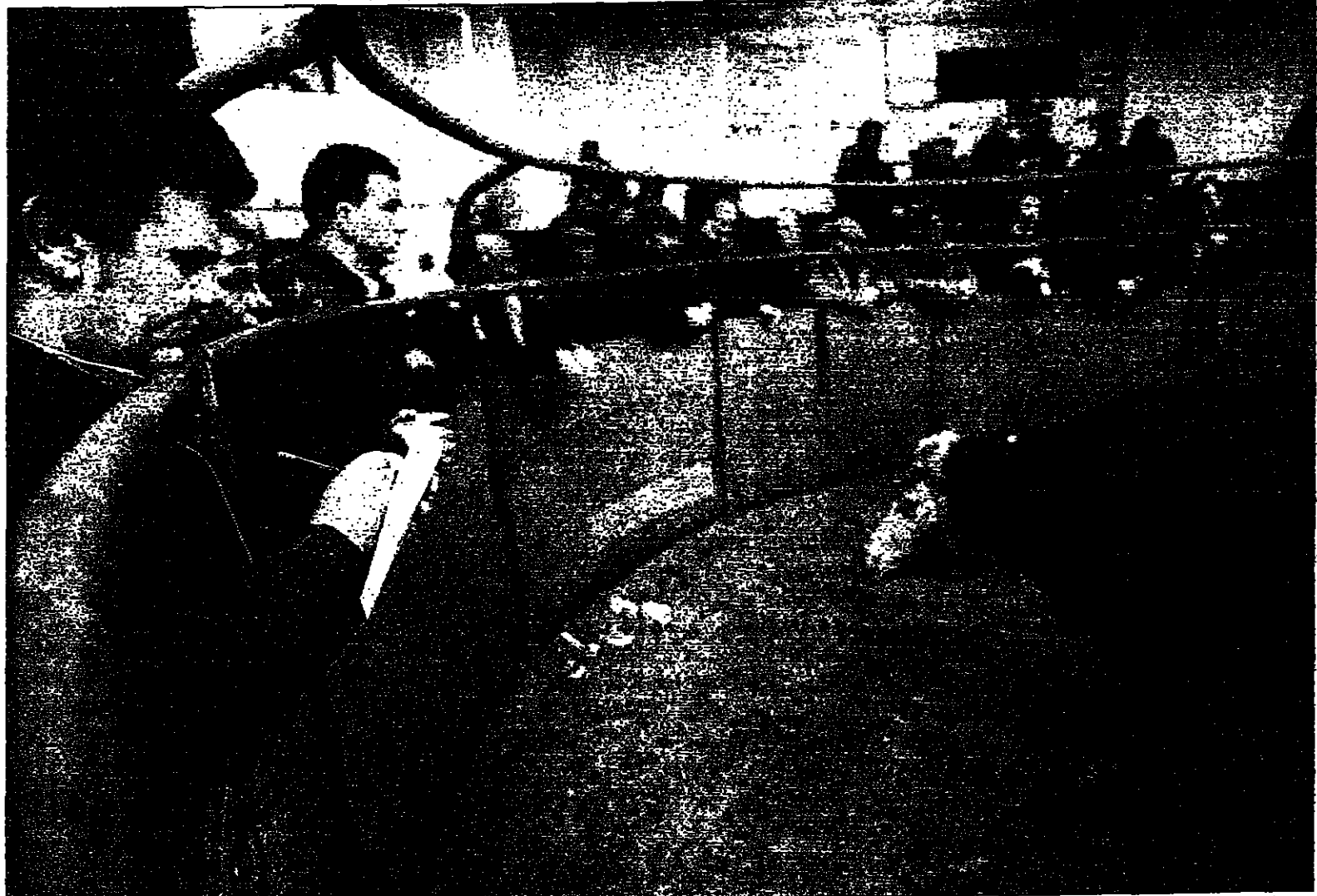
The members of SEAC are holding an emergency meeting this weekend at the urgent request of Stephen Dorrell, the Secretary of State for Health, to decide what advice to give the Government on allowing children to eat beef. It is expected that they will give special attention to the perceived risk from products such as sausages which use "mechanically recovered meat", produced by tearing the carcass apart using industrial equipment after the standard meat joints have been removed.

One government scientist, separate from SEAC but

involved in assessing the risk to the population from BSE, told the *Independent* yesterday: "The risk has never been from the muscle or the milk. It's all the other things. The constant tinkering that has been done with the legislation has been to make sure that the really dangerous tissues - the brain and spinal cord - don't get into meat products." It is in those tissues that the disease agent - a mutated cell-membrane protein known as a prion - is believed to breed and cause the disease.

But he admitted that in the light of the latest findings of SEAC - that 10 human deaths could have been caused by exposure to BSE-infected materials - he is re-calculating his risk assessments.

The new assessments will try to see whether it is reasonable to assume that the deaths were caused by exposure - occupational or otherwise - to materials which had been produced from BSE-infected cattle in the years before 1989. At that time, the Government introduced a series of measures banning the use of material from any cow's central nervous system in food for human consumption.



Price of meat: A buyer keeps track of trading at Banbury cattle market yesterday

Photograph: John Voos

Markets plummet in wake of scare

PAUL FIELD

BEEF PRICES

It was not business as usual yesterday at the cattle market in Banbury, Oxfordshire, as farmers saw profits tumble in the auction ring. What should have been the busiest day of the year so far turned out to be the worst.

As farmers herded unsold prime beef cattle into lorries, the pain of counting the costs of the latest BSE scare was all too evident on their solemn faces. In the morning, they had watched in dismay as an auction of around 600 heifers and steers worth £650,000 on a normal day, fetched under £200,000. Nearly half the livestock went unsold.

However, as the value of beef cattle dropped the price of pigs and sheep rose amid expectations that consumers will change their eating habits.

Jim Watson, managing director of Midland Mart, which runs the auction, said: "This

scare spells disaster for the farmers because a lot of them are already having trouble breaking even. Everyone is so despondent because they know recovery will take a long time."

The price of beef cattle at Banbury fell yesterday from an average of 120p per live kilo to 100p, resulting in a loss for the farmer of around £130 on each animal.

This was reflected across Britain. Many farmers held back their cattle as prices plummeted. On average prices were down £125 per head, from £725 last week. Small farmers - already on tight profit margins - face bleak prospects.

Mr Watson attacked the Government for failing to act as soon as "mad cow disease" was first detected in 1980s. "Farmers are picking up the tab for the

Government which mishandled this from the start. When BSE was first the Government should have taken infected cows out of the system but they were too worried about the cost."

Around ring two in the auction area, traders stood with hands in pockets, where their money was staying. One said: "We are reluctant to buy because we do not know if there is a market. The scare has shattered the confidence of the industry but it incenses me because we all stopped selling the bovine offal in 1989."

Farmers shook their heads in despair as it became evident they were not only taking less money home but cattle that was ready for sale. Richard Cottrell, who had brought 20 animals to sell, said: "I got £9,000 last week for 10 animals. With the price down by about 15p a kilo I can only expect about £7,000-£8,000 this week for the same number."

I have to sell the today otherwise they will get too fat."

He added: "It is doom and gloom here. People have a right to know about new scientific evidence but they should not stop eating beef. This cattle is safe."

Norman Thomas, who enjoyed spaghetti bolognese with his 12-year-old daughter and son aged 15 after the new evidence of a link between the human form of mad cow disease and infected beef emerged, said: "This is prime beef. There is no risk whatsoever."

Mr Thomas, who has a farm near Highworth, near Swindon, with around 200 beef cattle, was more optimistic. "I have sold eight animals today and am down £30 to £75 on each but I have made a small profit. We will still make money but it will be less than before."

He pointed out that most farmers will keep their heads above water because they practice mixed farming. Some will be able to balance their books owing to the increase in the price of pigs and sheep.

In the bar, away from the gloom of the auction, pints of beer failed to lift spirits - it was left to rounds of beef sandwiches and plates of roast beef and Yorkshire pudding to do the trick. Barmid Vivienne Booth had shifted 152 beef sandwiches by lunchtime. "They cannot get enough of them," she said.

Upstairs in the restaurant, a succulent shoulder of pork was noticeably untouched. Caterer Patricia Bott, busy carrying a rapidly diminishing joint of beef, said: "It's an act of defiance. The farmers are eating it in principle because beef is their livelihood."

Asked whether it was safe to eat, she replied: "I certainly hope so, with the amount the farmers have been getting through."

Pupils' menus changed

FRAN ABRAMS
Education Correspondent

SCHOOLS

More than one-third of all schools have stopped serving beef at meals because of fears about BSE, it was revealed yesterday. A further wave of bans has been announced in the wake of Wednesday's confirmation of links between infected meat and Creutzfeldt-Jacob disease.

Local authority caterers said that 10,000 out of 30,000 schools in England and Wales had stopped serving beef because of earlier scares.

Bans were already in place in at least 15 local authority areas, some in all schools and some just

in primary schools. Yesterday a further 11 authorities out of a total of 116 said either they were imposing an immediate ban or they were reviewing their school-meals policy.

Yesterday the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food cancelled a seminar scheduled for next week designed to persuade local authorities that beef was safe, saying that one of the main participants had had to drop out.

Last January Angela Browning, a junior minister, wrote to chief education officers ex-

pressing concern that they were not offering beef to children. "Beef is a safe and wholesome food and it would be unfortunate if growing children were denied it for no good reason," her letter said.

Yesterday the United Kingdom's biggest supplier of school meals, BET Catering Services, said the majority of local authorities in which it worked had already taken beef off primary school menus.

The Local Authority Caterers Association has joined ministers in asking the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee for clear guidance on the risks of serving beef to children.

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Organic farmers claim a clean record

Mea

Reluctance to

THE BSE RISK

Ban will send beef market into 'meltdown'

KATHERINE BUTLER
Brussels
and IMRE KARACS
Bonn

A Europe-wide ban on British beef was looming last night as consumers and their governments digested Britain's admission of a possible link between eating meat and the human form of "mad cow disease".

France, Belgium, Sweden and the Netherlands closed their borders to British beef and others were considering following suit. Germany said it wanted the EU to order a total

EUROPEAN RESPONSE

ban. European Commission experts held an emergency meeting with Britain's assistant chief veterinary officer, Kevin Taylor, to gather more details of the new evidence.

The Commission sought to play down any risk to consumers, pointing out that since 1990, when EU-wide curbs were first agreed, it had "erred on the side of caution". The rules, a spokesman said, were drawn up in anticipation of a possible link between BSE and Creutzfeldt Jakob Disease.

These require exports from Britain to be free of offal and nervous tissue; to come from herds free of BSE for at least six years and from animals younger than 30 months at the time of slaughter.

Of the 30 million EU cattle slaughtered each year out of a total herd of 80 million, the incidence of BSE - 12,000 cases, nearly all in Britain - is small, it was also stressed.

Privately, however, officials admitted they were bracing themselves for a potential collapse of the European beef market. "It may be too late for tighter measures. Rightly or

wrongly, housewives all over Europe are already turning their backs on beef in the shops. We could be looking at meltdown," one senior official said.

The Commission said it would wait for the advice of chief scientists and veterinary officers who will meet today, but it was prepared to move rapidly if they advised new health measures. It stressed that unilateral decisions to ban British beef - such as those taken by France - were illegal but that member states may invoke the EU treaty to block imports in the event of a grave threat to public or animal health.

Behind the scenes, alarmed EU agriculture officials were already considering what, if any, scope exists in the £30bn EU farm budget to compensate British livestock owners if total eradication of the UK herd of 11 million cattle goes ahead. But with animals valued at up to £1,000 each, compensation claims could run as high as £11bn. "It would bust the bank. It cannot be done," said one source.

There are also doubts in the Commission as to whether destroying the entire British herd would actually kill the BSE agent, which would live on in the

carcasses of infected animals unless they were all cremated. Taking the meat of healthy British animals into EU-funded cold storage is not a prospect either, as it would be virtually impossible to dispose of.

Germany has yet to put in place any unilateral measures, but will push hard for a Europe-wide ban, the government in Bonn said yesterday, and its influence will be pivotal.

"On the basis of the new information, the aim must be to secure a general export ban from Britain for beef, beef products, offal, animal meal and raw materials for pharma-

ceuticals and cosmetics in the European Union," the German agriculture and health ministries declared in a joint statement yesterday. "The measures must ensure that such products cannot be imported via a third country."

Germany, where consumer panic over mad cow disease has always been highest, warned its EU partners as long ago as 1994 that it did not believe Britain's claim that there was no link between the cattle brain condition and CJD in humans. A German health ministry report, submitted to the Commission in March 1994, stated: "The pos-

sibility can no longer be ruled out that the disease might be transmissible to humans."

The report continued: "Reports of suspected cases of CJD in fairly young people in the UK give good reason for concern. If, as with AIDS, the significance of the BSE problem is realised too late this may have grave consequences, proving fatal for virtually incalculable numbers of victims."

If this scenario materialised, the report warned, the issue of state liability had to be raised - meaning the Government could be liable to compensate victims.

Organic farmers claim a clean record

ROS WYNNE-JONES

No animal born on a certified organic farm has ever contracted BSE, the Soil Association said yesterday.

There have been seven cases of organically farmed cows infected with BSE, but all were on farms that had recently converted or were in the process of converting to organic methods. The use in livestock feed of animal remains, which is the transmission route for BSE, was banned in 1920 by organic farmers, said a spokeswoman.

Tim Finney, who runs a organic meat company near Swindon, Wiltshire, said when he first heard about BSE he was unsurprised. "I thought it served dairy farmers right."

"Dairy cows live a very hard life on conventional farms because milk is such a precious commodity. They were fed products made from old sheep and cows, even though they are naturally herbivores. If cows had never been given the feed in the first place we might never have seen BSE," he said.

Mr Finney, who has worked organically since the late 1980s, said that 99 per cent of BSE cases had been found in dairy cattle. "It is not beef cattle we need to worry about. It is dairy cattle who have come to the end of their lives and been slaughtered for meat which have contracted BSE to date."

"These cows are turned into manufacturing beef which goes into beef pies, tins and pasties - and is also used in schools, hospitals and work canteens because it is cheap."

Oliver Dowding, whose farm in Somerset is also recognised by the Soil Association as organic, said eating organic produce gave the public "personal guarantees of health and happiness". When he changed over to organic methods seven years ago he said his cows acted "like junkies coming off junk".

The cost of milk can be 20 per cent higher, and beef 10-12 per cent higher, when farmed organically. However, demand for organic produce exceeds availability and Mr Finney said his farm could not produce enough milk and meat. Patrick Holden, of the Soil Association, said not enough is being done to support organic farming.

The Soil Association uses a kitemark to identify produce farmed in a manner which complies with its regulations; and this is a guarantee that beef, or any other meat, has not been fed any animal or fish products or raised on land treated with any agro-chemicals or fertilisers.

Customers can check through the Soil Association how recently an organic farm has converted, should they be concerned about the lingering effects of previous conventional farming.

Where's the beef? What goes into different companies' meat products



Company	Source	Offal?	Comments
Waitrose	UK only	No	Cattle fed exclusively on natural forage and cattle feeds. Does not purchase cattle through livestock markets.
Asda	UK only	No	Suppliers audited to see no prohibited offal used.
Wimpy	EU	No	Beef carries EU Veterinary Certificate. Meat taken from flank and forequarters.
Marks and Spencer	UK, Ireland, US, timed meat from Argentina and Brazil	No	No cow beef used. SBOs never used in St Michael products, even prior to 1989 ban. All British beef fresh, not frozen.

Company	Source	Offal?	Comments
McDonalds	UK, France, Holland, Ireland	No	EU-approved abattoirs. 40 separate checks carried out by McDonalds.
Burger King	UK, Eire, Botswana	No	Only ground beef from flank and forequarter used. EU Veterinary Certificate.
Starbucker	UK only	No	Suppliers are Oakland Fast Foods, same as Burger King and Wimpy.
Sainsbury	Confidential	No	SBOs removed from cattle early on, as a precaution.
Little Chef and Happy Eater	UK, South America	No	No 'controversial parts of the carcass' used. Company stress that alternative dishes to beef are available.

Company	Source	Offal?	Comments
Birds Eye Walls	Unavailable	No	Use only 'select cuts' of beef.
Finch	EU, South America	No	Constantly reviewing the latest research. Suppliers audited regularly.
Indian restaurants			Do not tend to use a lot of beef, only as concession to Anglicised appetites. Often bought frozen.
Chinese restaurants			A lot of beef used in Chinese cooking. Usually of a fairly high quality because of nature of dishes, cooked for less than Indian food.

Meat buying's 20-year decline

GLENDA COOPER

The recent fall in beef consumption is only part of a 20-year trend in which Britons have turned away from meat, according to the latest data collected by the Economic and Social Research Council.

Researchers found that there had been a marked shift away from meat buying since 1973 across all groups, but that the move had been particularly strong among women and young people.

A childless, single 30-year-old woman is now 20 per cent less likely to buy meat than 20 years ago and her male contemporary is 15 per cent less likely to.

The proportion of people who say that they are vegetarians also more than doubled from 1984 to 1995, to the point where 4.5 per cent of adults now declare themselves to be vegetarians.

THE CONSUMER

For example, tofu, TVP and Quorn - increased by 279 per cent over the period 1988 to 1991, reaching a value of £25m a year.

The more educated the household, the less likely it is to eat meat. Those who continue to buy red meat include the unemployed, the retired and those who live in cities.

However, there are indications that people tire of a vegetarian diet as they get older - a 40-year-old man is more likely to choose a steak or a chicken wing than a 30-year-old man is. Parenthood also boosts the probability of buying meat. A 30-year-old single man with children, for example, is 16 per cent more likely to buy meat than if he is childless.

The ESRC researchers warn the meat industry that it is not factors such as price or level of income but consumer attitude that is increasingly affecting meat-eating habits.

Dr Trevor Young, one of the authors of the report, also undertook a survey on whether the bovine spongiform encephalopathy scares of 1989/90 had had a significant effect on beef consumption.

"There now seems to be a popular perception that the consumption of beef has declined significantly and permanently as a result of BSE," he concluded.

The researchers found that the market share of beef was "relatively constant" until the end of the Eighties, but there was a substantial fall and an accelerating downward trend thereafter.

In order to work out whether public perception of BSE had

any connection with the fall in sales, the researchers looked at the amount of media coverage.

National newspapers in the United Kingdom published 1,565 articles on BSE between 1989 and 1993, of which 9 per cent were published by the end of 1989 and 79 per cent by the end of 1990.

"We estimate that media concern about BSE caused a 'transitory' loss of 5.7 percentage points in the market share of beef [ie from approximately 30.7 per cent to 25 per cent of the expenditure on meat] in the second quarter of 1990, the quarter in which most articles referring to BSE were printed," Dr Young said.

"We further estimate that the long-run effect is less but still substantial, with a sustained decline of some 4.5 percentage points in the share of beef by the end of 1993."

What the Cabinet will be eating

JOJO MOYES, CLARE GARNER and ROB CRANE

John Major, Prime Minister: "Will of course continue to eat beef and serve it to his guests".

And his children? "No reason to suppose that wouldn't be the case. But his children are young adults so the question doesn't really apply." (Press Secretary)

Stephen Dorrell, Secretary of State for Health: "I eat beef and my young children are eating beef."

Michael Portillo, Secretary of State for Defence: "My family will continue to eat beef as part of a balanced diet."

Virginia Bottomley, Heritage Secretary: Said she had visited her local McDonald's in Old Kent Road yesterday with her husband and had eaten a beefburger.

John Gummer, Secretary of State for the Environment: "Beef will still be served. Myself and my family will continue to eat beef."

Gillian Shepherd, Secretary of State for Education and Employment: "Mrs Shepherd's view is that the Chief Medical Officer said he will continue to eat beef as part of a balanced diet and so will she."

Roger Freeman, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster: "It would be a personal matter for the minister concerned." (Press Secretary)

Ian Lang, President of the Board of Trade and Secretary of State for Trade and Industry: "I will continue to eat beef."

Viscount Cranborne, Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Lords: "Yes, I am still eating beef, it is still being served and it is still part of my varied diet."

Sir George Young, Secretary of State for Transport: "These are obviously personal matters that we won't be dealing with from the department's point of view." (A spokesman)

Peter Lilley, Secretary of State for Social Security: "I haven't been able to have a word with him." (A spokeswoman)

Michael Forsyth, Secretary of State for Scotland: "He is not available for comment. He is dealing with Dunblane."

Sir Patrick Mayhew, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: "The Secretary of State and his family continue to eat beef."

William Waldegrave, Chief Secretary to the Treasury: "You are not the first person to ask this question today. He's been in meetings all day. I don't think we are likely to get an answer now." (A spokesman)

Reluctance to react exacerbated problem

WILL BENNETT

The first case of BSE was discovered in 1985 but it was more than four years before the cattle products thought most likely to act as pathways for the disease were banned for human consumption.

That crucial period provided a crucial window for infection to pass from cattle to humans. Meanwhile, the number of cattle with BSE increased, one independent estimate putting the total in Britain between 1981 and 1985 at 675,000.

BSE was first officially diagnosed by the Central Veterinary Laboratory, a government

agency which comes under the umbrella of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) in November 1986. But it was not made public until the following year when tests began to see whether BSE could be transmitted to infected cattle's offspring and to other species.

In April 1988, the Government appointed a committee under Sir Richard Southwood to assess the significance of BSE. In June that year, the committee recommended that infected animals be destroyed, that milk from such animals be

disposed of, and that BSE be made a notifiable disease, which meant farmers were required by law to report cases to MAFF.

On 21 June 1988, BSE became a notifiable disease and on 18 July the feeding of cattle or sheep protein to other cattle or sheep was banned. It is believed that BSE resulted from cattle eating feed containing offal from sheep infected with scrapie.

The third measure resulting from the Southwood recommendations showed the Government's half-hearted commitment to tackling the problem - on 8 August, it announced that infected cattle should be slaughtered but that farmers would

only get 50 per cent compensation. It was hardly an inducement to report cases of BSE and it was not until February 1990 that full compensation was introduced.

It took until December 1983 for the Government to implement Southwood's recommendation that milk from infected animals should be destroyed, and it was not until April 1989 that they acted on the suggestion that a research committee be set up to discover the full extent of the threat to animals and humans.

On 13 November 1989 - almost 18 months after concern was first expressed about the possible inclusion of cattle brains in

foods such as meat pies - bovine offals such as brains, spinal cords, gut, tonsils, thymus and spleen were banned for human consumption. It was another three months before the measure was introduced in Scotland.

Offals were thought to be the most likely route for infection. But even this measure was incomplete as cattle up to six months old were exempted because it was thought that they represented less of a hazard.

Research has shown that BSE is transmissible to mice from the intestines of young cattle, but it was not until July 1994 that the ban was extended to cattle under six months old.

Britain holds breath on CJD epidemic

THE FUTURE

CHARLES ARTHUR and LIZ HUNT

The nation may know by the end of this year whether it faces an epidemic of people suffering from Creutzfeldt Jakob Disease (CJD) triggered by eating BSE-infected beef in the 1980s.

Government scientists are urgently re-examining their original risk assessments of the dangers posed by eating BSE-infected beef products. They want to see what the chances are that the 10 CJD cases which alerted them to a possible link with BSE were the tip of a slowly surfacing iceberg - or a statistical blip.

"We are on tenterhooks about the scenario that might emerge," said one member of SEAC, the independent expert committee, yesterday. "But we think it should become clearer in the next six-to-12 months. If we don't see too many cases then it could be that there won't be an epidemic."

To guide them, the scientists on SEAC and at the Government's own laboratories have three existing models for the transmission of "spongiform encephalopathies" - of which BSE is one type. One is scrapie, the form it takes in sheep; another is bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), which affects cattle; and the third is kuru, caused by cannibalism in humans, but which is effectively indistinguishable from CJD.

Kuru has a median incubation period of about 12 years, and the 10 CJD cases appeared in the past two years. This, say the scientists, implies that the victims were exposed to the disease agent in about 1983-84, when the BSE epidemic was just beginning. If these 10 people represent the typical proportion of the population who will contract CJD, many thousands of people could succumb in the next five years, having eaten infected material between 1983 and 1989.

However, the case of FSE may be a better guide. That first appeared in cases in 1989, almost certainly from eating infected cattle remains in food. But though it must have had an incubation period, and the number of cases of BSE did not peak for another three years, the number of cases diagnosed as having FSE has not increased radically, but has remained fairly steady.

"It could be that the reason for that is that we don't recycle offal to feed to cats. That was done with cows - and the BSE epidemic followed. The thing to remember is, we don't recycle human remains," said one scientist yesterday, weighing up the potential for an epidemic. That would imply that the new, BSE-induced CJD required a high dose and only affected certain susceptible individuals - meaning that the number of cases will remain comparatively low.

Significantly, Rob Will, head of the CJD Surveillance Unit, which spotted the new trend in CJD cases in February, told the Independent yesterday: "We do not have a large number of suspected CJD cases in the pipeline."

It could be that BSE is not easily passed on to humans. People have eaten sheep infected with scrapie since the 18th century, but the incidence of CJD is not related to the incidence of scrapie: countries such as New Zealand, where scrapie is unknown, still record cases of CJD.

Accurate projections of the number of cases of CJD that may arise in a population exposed to BSE-infected meat are further hampered by the lack of diagnostic tests for CJD before symptoms appear.

6
politics

MPs condemn student loans firm 'blunders'

CHRIS BLACKHURST
Westminster Correspondent

A powerful group of MPs yesterday castigated the Department of Education and Employment for a series of serious errors in setting up the company to run the Government's loan scheme for students on university, polytechnic and higher education courses.

The Commons Public Accounts Select Committee, which carries a majority of Conservative members, used unusually strong language in its report on the troubled six-year history of the Student Loans Company.

At the same time, in the appendix at the back of the committee report, it was revealed that the financially squeezed, state-owned company had also been hauled over the coals by the National Audit Office, the public finance watchdog, for making charitable donations. Officials at the Department knew about the donations but as soon as the NAO discovered them, the company was told to stop giving taxpayers' money away. Such donations, warned the NAO, were not allowed

under Government accounting rules.

Around 35,000 students suffered delays averaging six weeks in receiving their cheques from the company. When they tried to chase their money, they could not get through, since the switchboard was permanently jammed.

Out of 1.1 million attempted phone calls, only 45,000 succeeded in getting through, something the MPs said they "deplored". They rejected the company's explanation that installing extra telephone lines would have taken too long to solve the problem.

The company had an independent "assessor" to deal with customer complaints. He was paid a retainer of £8,000 a year and in four years only one case was referred to him. The committee said it was "concerned" that his pay was "unrelated to his caseload". Bizarrely, the company's own internal study had identified "fundamental weaknesses in planning and decision-making" yet it ploughed on, regardless. The committee said it was "concerned that so little effort was

made to assess the risks involved in a major new initiative".

Members were "dismayed" that student representative bodies were not consulted about the scheme before it was set up.

It was vital, said MPs, that the DFEE took a firmer grip of the company, especially since the catalogue of blunders meant the original plan to transfer the organisation to the private sector had been temporarily shelved.

Under the revised plan, the company continues as before, with banks and other financial institutions also being encouraged to give loans. The committee said this "twin-track" approach "had introduced considerable uncertainty into the company's corporate planning". It recommended officials "enhance their monitoring of the company during this period."

At present the company reckons on writing-off £15m worth of loans where students have defaulted. MPs warned the company "there was no room for complacency" in this area and stressed that in their eyes, a student who borrowed money, then avoided repaying the loan, had committed fraud.

Tory rebels fall out over divorce Bill

PATRICIA WYNN DAVIES
Legal Affairs Editor

The barrage of Tory opposition to the Government's Family Law Bill was in disarray last night as key Conservative family campaigners pledged their support for its central plank of "no fault" divorce after a year.

The surprise declaration from Julian Brazier MP, president, and Hugh Mackinlay, chairman, of the Conservative Family Campaign provoked immediate condemnation from other sponsors of the organisation, but was gratefully seized upon by Jonathan Evans, the junior Lord Chancellor's Department minister in charge of the Bill.

The split among the campaign's sponsors came after Mr Brazier, MP for Canterbury, and Mr Mackinlay circulated a letter to all Conservative MPs saying: "There is no doubt that with further amendment, the present Bill will remove many of the inequities of the present divorce system and create a much fairer system for children and

the innocent party in divorce."

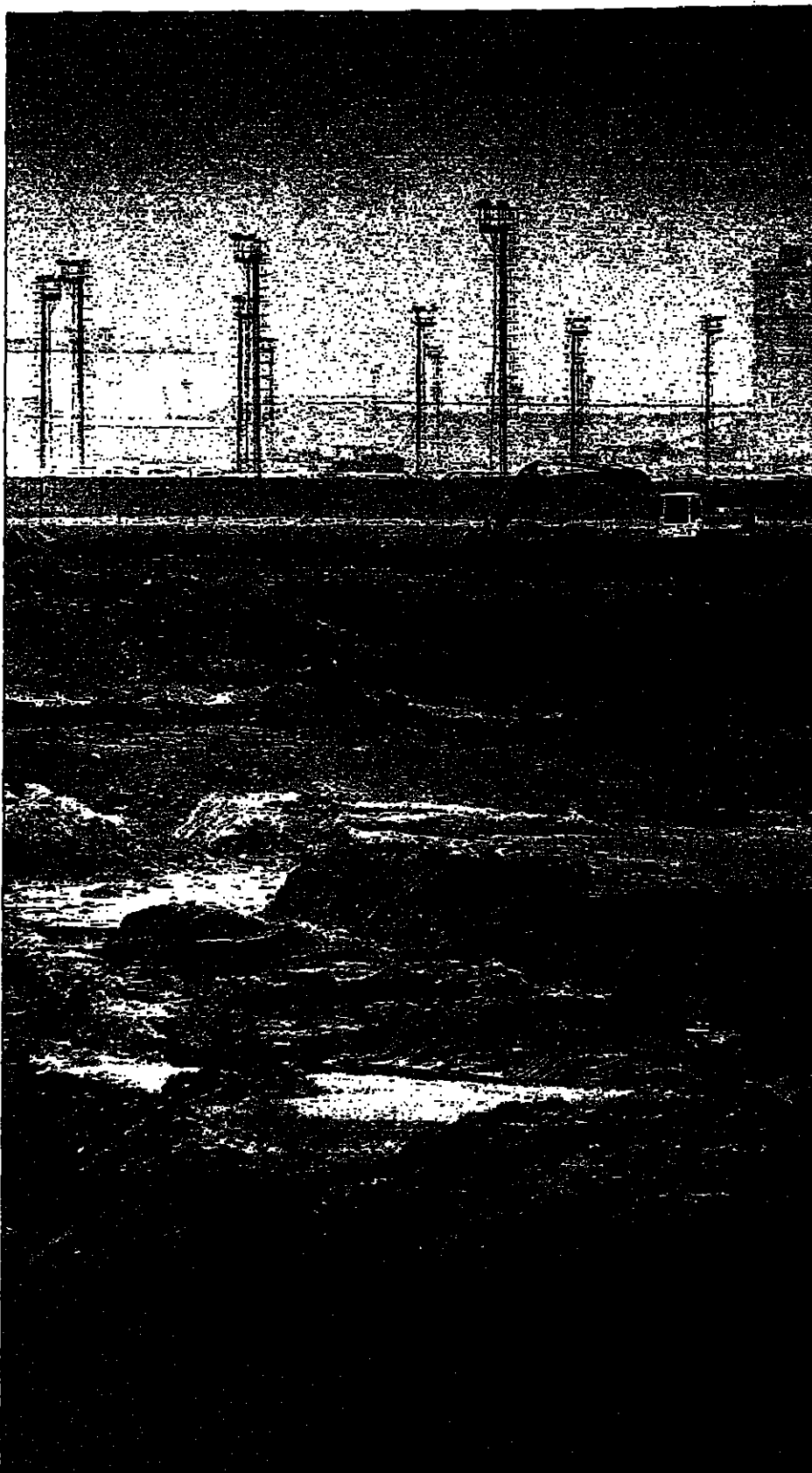
In direct contradiction of calls by Tory rebels to retain adultery and unreasonable behaviour as evidence of marital breakdown, the letter said that current law had become "totally discredited with courts granting divorces in a matter of weeks". Fault had been abused to the extent that a totally innocent party could be sued for unreasonable behaviour. "The fault system that we have at present is manifestly unfair."

In a move that took hard-line opponents by surprise, the letter urged all MPs to support the Bill on its Commons second reading on Monday, while pledging to fight for amendments on the splitting of property and pensions. But Lady Olga Maitland, MP for Sutton and Cheam and one of the Bill's most outspoken critics, said: "I wasn't consulted. They speak for themselves. My views haven't changed." Lady Olga, parliamentary private secretary to John Wheeler, the Northern Ireland minister, is one of a

number of members of government who will use the free votes during the Bill's committee stage to attempt to retain fault and to extend the minimum 12-month period of reflection and consideration to 18 months or two years.

The Bill's opponents are incensed that the waiting period for a divorce would be brought down from a maximum of five years in a handful of cases, and that divorce by consent - without giving a reason - will be allowed after a year instead of the current two.

Holding out another olive branch to the Government, the letter pledged support for the principle of pension splitting, but said the Lords' amendment to introduce it was "inadequately drafted". It boosts the prospects of the Government persuading a sufficient number of Tory rebels to vote against retaining the amendment - although that would be on condition that ministers gave a clear commitment to bring in their own legislation.



Lappel Bank: 'Classic case of development versus conservation' Photograph: John Voos

Bird haven 'destroyed illegally'

CLARE GARNER

The Government illegally destroyed a haven for wildlife by turning it into a car storage park, the European Court's advocate-general declared yesterday.

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) has won the first step in its battle in the Luxembourg court to establish that governments cannot take account of economic requirements when classifying Special Protection Zones or determining their boundaries.

The important test case concerns Lappel Bank on the River Medway in Kent, part of a "wetland of international im-

portance" and home to rare bird species protected under European law, which was turned into a huge car park to store Japanese cars imported through the adjoining port of Sheerness.

In a court hearing earlier this year, the Government claimed there were "overwhelming economic reasons" for excluding Lappel Bank from the 4,600 hectares of the Medway estuary and marshes, a wetland noted for a range of wildfowl species. But lawyers for the European Commission, backing the RSPB, declared yesterday it was a classic case of "development versus conservation".

The interim finding, which is not binding on the full court when it rules in the summer, said member states are not entitled to take account of economic requirements when classifying Special Protection Areas or determining their boundaries. It is a huge boost for the RSPB, which lost its case in the United Kingdom courts. The final outcome will be too late for Lappel Bank, where the mudflats have already been concreted over, but the victory could prevent a repeat.

Barbara Young, chief executive of the RSPB, said: "This is one in the eye for the Government. It has justifiably got a bloody nose."

Howling sceptics seek to topple Euro-temple

□ Lamont forecasts clash with EU
□ MP urges defiance of European Court
□ Cook ridicules Tory 'Canutes'

Malcolm Rifkind, the Foreign Secretary, was last night instructed by Tory sceptics to "bring down the temple" of the European Union if Britain did not get its way at the forthcoming Inter-Governmental Conference.

Former Chancellor Norman Lamont said it seemed Britain was "headed for a clash with Europe" and hinted at withdrawal from the EU. If differences were not reconciled, the time would come when Britain had to consider "much more radical alternatives", he told the Commons.

A full-scale debate on the Government's approach to the conference, which opens in Turin next week, saw the sceptics howling with anger when Mr Rifkind said Britain should continue to obey the European Court of Justice.

With the 48-hour week ruling still smarting, Mr Rifkind said the Government wanted to "improve the working" of the court so that it did not bring its reputation into disrepute with interpretations that went beyond what was intended when laws were framed.

But when Nicholas Budge, Tory MP for Wolverhampton SW, asked if he would hold open the prospect of Britain ignoring the court if it was not reformed, the Foreign Secretary replied: "I don't believe it would be the will of the British people to disobey the law."

"Who's law?" bellowed the sceptics. Two of them demanded Mr Rifkind make regular reports to the Commons on the IGC negotiations - a request he acceded to - though Sir Peter Japsell, MP for Lindsey East, said they would drag on beyond the general election. "The serious negotiation won't start until then because [some states] hope they will have a Labour government to deal with," Sir Peter maintained.

Bill Cash, Tory MP for Stafford, said the Government was going into the IGC in a spirit of "appeasement" and not proposing radical plans for fear others would respond when an integrationist agenda. Patrick Nicholls, MP for Teignbridge, said Mr Rifkind seemed to be saying there would be no sticking point. He should say to Britain's partners there was a point where "we will bring the temple down" rather than give way.

Mr Rifkind said Britain favoured a "partnership of nations" and would continue to resist moves towards a "united states of Europe". He revisited the Prime Minister's "variable

geometry" Europe, with different degrees of integration for different countries. The opt-out from the Social Chapter was an example and the single currency would be another.

In a more appealing section for the Euro-sceptics, he said some of the ideas for the IGC, particularly those from the Commission and the European Parliament, were driven by an "ideological mission" to maintain the momentum of integration. A clear example was more qualified majority voting (QMV) which the Government would oppose.

Those who wanted an extension of QMV really wanted it for all decisions. "But they know that is non-negotiable at the present time. So they are seeking half a loaf now, hoping to secure the other half, the flour and the whole bakery, when they can."

"That is the objective of the European Parliament, of the

Inside
Parliament
Stephen
Goodwin

Commission and of a significant number of continental politicians. They want to extend QMV now as part of a long term ambition of building a federal Europe."

But pro-European Edwin Currie, MP for Derbyshire South, said there were some Tories "who aren't nearly as frightened of QMV as the Government appears to be".

"One of our fears if the votes are retained in the form that they are at the moment is that the enlargement process would bring in a number of small countries, who would have the veto. Many of us on this side do not wish to be told by small countries new to Europe what to do," Mrs Currie said.

The official opposition was kinder to Mr Rifkind, though Robin Cook, probably did not help the Foreign Secretary standing with the sceptics by reminding them that, as backbencher, Mr Rifkind had told the Commons he believed "united states of Europe might be a good thing".

"Gearing up to fight the next election on the slogan of 'Bring back King Canute,'" the Labour spokesman said.

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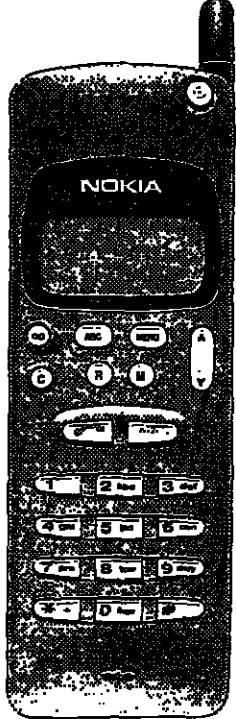
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Labour proposes extra lessons for sixth-formers

FRAN ABRAMS
Education Correspondent

Sixth-formers could spend up to 12 hours extra in lessons each week under a Labour government, while disaffected 14-year-olds could be sent to college to take vocational courses.

Under Labour's plans for 14- to 19-year-olds, published yesterday, both A-Levels and their vocational equivalents would lead to an "Advanced Diploma" qualification. But to gain this certificate, students would be expected to take extra courses in subjects such as information technology, maths and communication skills.

David Blunkett, Labour's education spokesman, said that

sixth-formers in England had only 18 hours of lessons a week, while their counterparts in France and Germany had 30.

The party's paper, *Aiming Higher*, stops short of proposing the abolition of the A-levels. Instead, it said, qualifications such as the existing General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) should be given parity of esteem with the academic exams. Both should lead to the Advanced Diploma, which would be equivalent to two A-Levels or one advanced GNVQ, plus the extra "core skills".

In addition to its plans for sixth-formers, Labour plans to reform education for 14 to 16-year-olds. Mr Blunkett said

yesterday that 1 pupil in 10 left school with no qualifications at all, while in some schools the figure was as high as 30 per cent.

These youngsters should be freed from some of the demands of the national curriculum so that they could spend a day or more each week at college, he said. They could follow vocational courses which might motivate them more effectively than academic study in which they were likely to fail.

Funding cuts have left universities with a stark choice between cutting student numbers or putting the quality of their courses at risk, the Higher Education Quality Council, set up to monitor standards, argues in a new report.

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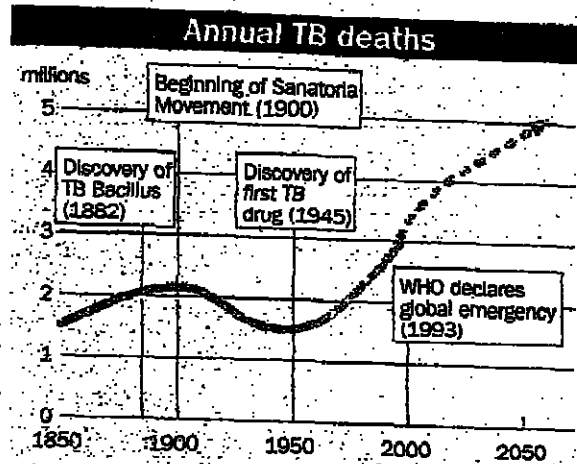
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Global TB epidemic killing 3 million a year



LIZ HUNT
Health Editor

Tuberculosis is now killing more people than at any other time in history, the World Health Organisation warned yesterday, with one person infected every second and nearly 3 million deaths annually.

Scientists predict that up to a half a billion people will be infected with TB in the next 50 years if present rates continue. And they say that growing numbers are developing multi-drug resistant forms which can cost \$250,000 (£170,000) per patient to treat, compared with less

than \$100 for non-resistant forms, and are often incurable. "Not only has TB returned, it has upstaged its own horrible legacy," said Dr Hiroshi Nakajima, director-general of the WHO.

Paul Nunn, chief of research for the WHO's global TB programme, said the threat was far worse than that posed by the possible link between mad cow disease and Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease. While the UK population should be legitimately concerned about CJD, he said, the scare should be put in perspective.

The Government's report states there are 10 cases of CJD which may be linked to mad cow disease. There are 3 million deaths a year from TB. That is a rather larger number.

Increased travel to and from countries where TB is endemic and control is poor; migration; political upheavals, with the accompanying collapse of public health infrastructure; and the growth of homelessness and poverty, are responsible for the re-emergence of the disease in the developed world.

Outbreaks of multi-drug-resistant TB have now been reported recently in London, Milan, New York City, Chicago, Atlanta, Paris, Estonia, and cities in India, Thailand, South Africa, and Pakistan.

Mass screening - chest X-rays were a useful public health weapon against TB until the 1950s - is once again being made available by charities, such as Crisis, to high-risk groups such as the homeless.

Speaking at a press conference in London yesterday, Dr Arata Kochi, director of the WHO's global programme, said that many politicians were "still behaving as if TB did not exist" despite the alarming figures.

The bad news is the TB epidemic is moving faster than we are. The frightening extent of the spread of TB has yet to be understood by many leaders. Governments in wealthy and developing countries alike are still not responding to the warnings that their people are at serious risk.

Other diseases - such as flesh-eating bacteria, plague, and the Ebola virus - have captured the public's attention, and are higher on the public policy agenda than TB.

Dr John Moore-Gillon, chairman of the British Lung Foundation, said that TB in London had risen by 50 per cent since 1987, and there were now "an extra 8,000 unexpected new

cases" in Britain. "Cases multi-drug-resistant TB occur scores, not thousands or hundreds of thousands. Will we see more? If we let our guard down then yes we will," he said.

Better surveillance, improved diagnostic testing and more powerful drugs, were urgent needs, Dr Moore-Gillon said. "We need greater public, professional, and political awareness. Predictions made in the 1950s that TB would be eradicated from developed countries and there would be progress in the Third World in controlling it, were horribly and devastatingly wrong."

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BSkyB linked to rescue plan for Ally Pally

PAUL FIELD

BSkyB, the satellite network, is believed to be involved in secret talks which could lead to it being part of a takeover deal for the debt-ridden Alexandra Palace, the birthplace of BBC television, in north London.

Although BSkyB has denied it is directly involved in talks, it is understood that Hararey council, trustee of the palace, wants to include the satellite network in any final deal with one of three different consortia with which it is negotiating. Any deal would be worth several million pounds and is said to involve BSkyB building a television studio.

The move would provide BSkyB with a prestigious broadcasting site and generate enormous publicity for any future development at the palace, which would benefit Hararey.

The council is anxious to proceed with a money-spinning private development to make the 123-year-old Ally Pally commercially viable, helping to clear its £55m debt, the largest deficit facing any local authority in the country.

Hararey has shortlisted three developers and the Independent understands that a BSkyB initiative would complement whichever scheme is selected on 10 May.

However, any development needs parliamentary approval and, to reach that stage, liability for the debt - at present spiralling at £16,000 a day - must be settled. The council, seeking to avoid the full debt, is under pressure from Sir Nicholas Lyall, the Attorney General, to show it has managed the palace affairs prudently.

Hararey has run the building and 220-acre park at Muswell Hill through a charitable trust since taking it over from the Greater London Council in 1980. The BSkyB op-

tion was discussed at a meeting of the development steering committee last Monday, according to a source close to the council leader Toby Harris, who refused to confirm or deny the satellite network was involved.

"The council has approached a large number of organisations about the possibility of their involvement in the future development of the palace. Details are confidential," he said.

BSkyB said Chris Mackenzie, its general manager who would oversee such a scheme, had not talked to Hararey.

However, the source claimed the council has held meetings with BSkyB representatives. "They have been talking about a TV studio and broadcasting museum. The attraction for Sky is Ally Pally's a great site for outside broadcasts. There is prestige attached to it - one in the eye for the BBC."

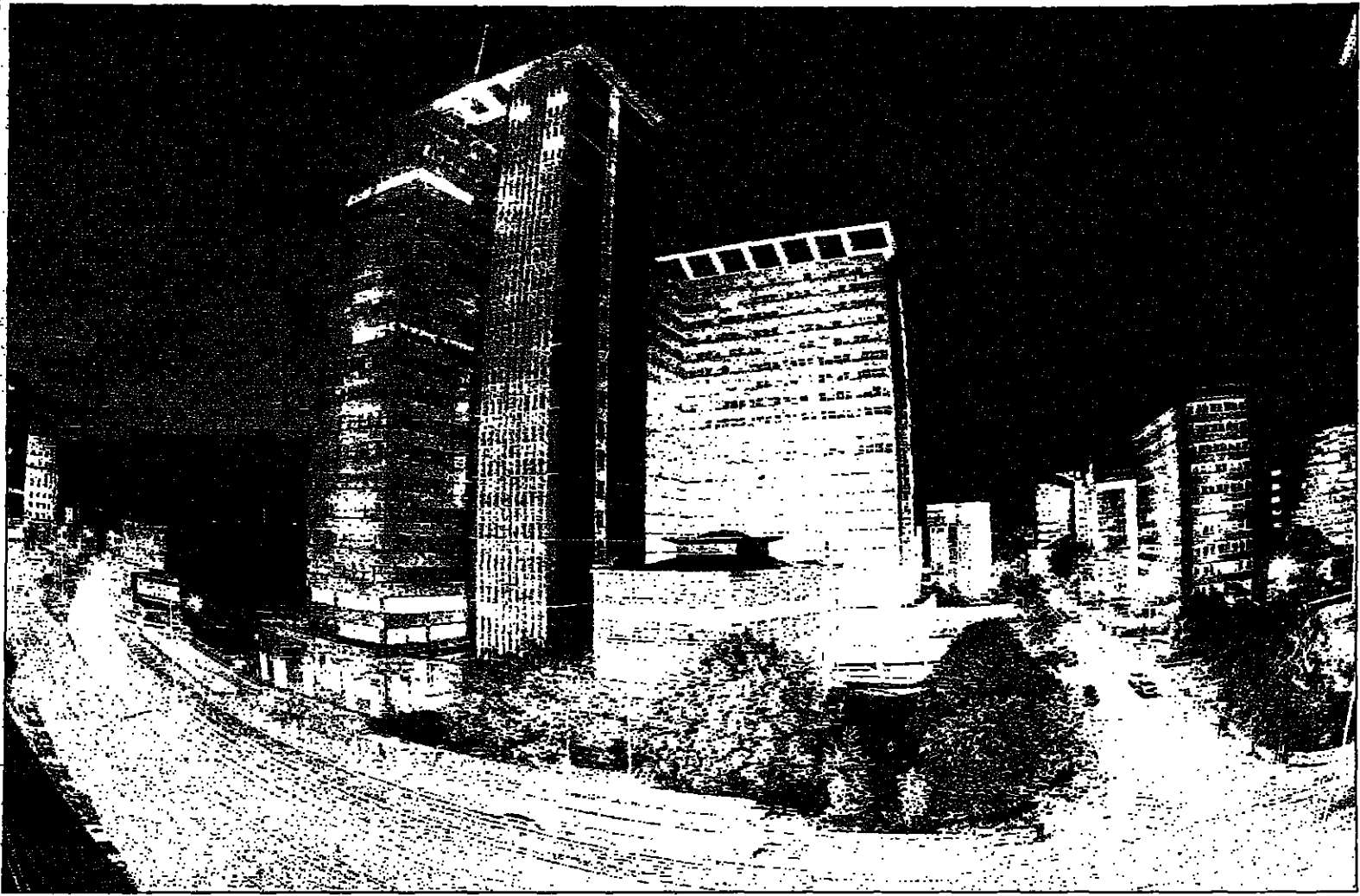
The three developers shortlisted last month are due to submit detailed proposals by the end of April. The Independent has seen preliminary proposals.

A bid from Mercury Group, believed to be worth more than £25m, includes an autopark, a huge site where customers can buy and test-drive cars, a futuristic lake and an underground shopping centre. Morrison Developments and Champions Leisure propose a multi-activity leisure centre.

Michael Moss, managing director of Alexandra Development, said he wanted to give the palace back to the people by working with the local community. "Our proposal includes an exhibition hall, cinema, hotel and museum of broadcasting," he said.

This is not the first time Hararey has tried to extricate itself from the palace. Schemes have included indoor real-snow ski slopes but every plan has been blocked because of the debt liability.

Town sets shining example in quest for millennium cash



Croydon, symbol of suburban mediocrity, is trying to brighten its image with what it describes as 'the most adventurous building lighting scheme ever staged in a British town'. The display - on show tonight and tomorrow - is part of the south London borough's bid for Millennium Commission funding

Green group warns on environment

CLARE GARNER

Environmental standards in the British Isles and surrounding seas continue to deteriorate in spite of growing public concern about green issues, according to a report published yesterday.

After the Government released its Sustainable Development Indicators last week, Green Gauge, an alliance of environmental organisations, an-

nounced its indicators, noting six areas of public concern.

Speaking at the launch, the environmentalist Jonathan Porritt, said: "Our environment is getting worse, even the Government's figures say so. There must now be immediate action to stem the tide of environmental degradation in the UK."

Six key areas highlighted in the Green Gauge '96 report:

■ Vanishing species: more than 100 species have become extinct in the UK this century. Intensive agriculture has seen the loss of farmland flowers from 92 per cent of their traditional habitat and a decline in birds such as skylarks.

■ Disappearing countryside: rural land has been urbanised at the rate of more than 11,000 hectares a year with traditional countryside features such as hedgerows still being lost.

■ Fresh water: while the length of good quality rivers has risen from 45 per cent to 60 per cent since 1968, lack of water has become a threat to many others: 75 per cent of low rivers suffering from over-abstraction await long-term solutions.

■ Transport: motor vehicle use is still rising as public transport use declines. Exhaust emissions cut air quality and contribute to the problem of climate change.

■ Coastal and marine: over-fishing is one of the most serious problems facing the marine environment and the UK Government has failed to meet EU targets to cut its fishing fleet.

■ Britain's impact abroad: less than 1 per cent of timber and pulp imported has been certified sustainable; overseas aid stands at 0.31 per cent of GDP, well below the UN target of 0.7 per cent.

Professor David Londo, registrar of the college, admitted that the guidelines might have to be altered in light of the latest case.

"Our guidance is based on the best evidence available to us at the time and is intended to help doctors by differentiating the clinical states in line with current knowledge," he said.

"When we have seen it clinical details of this case, we will review the guidance we have given."

New code issued on coma patients

New guidelines to help doctors treating patients in comas were published yesterday by the Royal College of Physicians.

The move follows heightened public concern about the ethics of stopping the treatment of patients being kept artificially.

There have been a number of reports of patients in a permanent vegetative state (PVS) waking up or showing signs of consciousness.

The college said the guidelines were drawn up before a recent case of a businessman who started communicating with hospital staff after being in a PVS for seven years.

They would be reviewed again once the clinical details of the case had been studied.

The guidelines followed recommendations from the House of Lords Select Committee on Medical Ethics that PVS should be defined and code of practice developed.

They recommend that a diagnosis of PVS should only be made when a patient has been in a continuing vegetative state for more than 12 months after a head injury, or six months following other causes of brain damage. A continuing vegetative state was said to occur when the patient failed to show signs of recovery after more than four weeks.

Professor David Londo, registrar of the college, admitted that the guidelines might have to be altered in light of the latest case.

"Our guidance is based on the best evidence available to us at the time and is intended to help doctors by differentiating the clinical states in line with current knowledge," he said.

"When we have seen it clinical details of this case, we will review the guidance we have given."



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International

War in the Caucasus: Villagers must hand over rebels or face shelling as vote-seeking Yeltsin seeks 'peace'

Chechens' terror at Russian bombers

IL REEVES
Yurt

re's how they tell the story of Yurt, a farming village in the plains of Chechnya. Not long ago a Russian general in the 58th Army, an angry character, arrived in the village and demanded to see the elders. He had a ultimatum: the village had a day to hand over 100 weapons and 10 prisoners of war or he would bombard the place. The village was surrounded by his tanks. It was as simple and as brutal as that.

How would you feel in my place? asked Ali Bashayev, mayor, as he sat with a group of worried residents in a village home. "We can't sleep at night or day, because every minute we expect them to come and bomb us." As he spoke, the winds whistled through the trees and the sound of distant explosions was heard.

Yurt is not alone. It is one of many villages in Chechnya that have been the target of Russian bombing. The Russian army has been conducting a campaign of terror in the region, demanding that villagers hand over weapons and prisoners of war. If they refuse, they face shelling and bombing.

But it is clear that Moscow is in breach of its commitments to human rights, as a new member of the Council of Europe. In the last few days, Russia has been bombing the village of Samashki, where its troops conducted a massacre last year, and where thousands of residents are now said to be in hiding. Other settlements - Orekhovo and Stary Achkhoi, for example - have also been under fire.

So what is Russia up to? Crucial is the presidential election, now only three months away. President Yeltsin has committed himself to ending the war before polling day. He fears he may lose if he fails to do so, although he is now reducing some of the large lead enjoyed in the polls by the Communist front-runner, Gennady Zyuganov.

The president claims to have worked out a peace plan with his Security Council, but is keeping it under wraps until this month's end. Yet, in the war-torn republic itself, his army and the Chechen government are already engaged in securing a settlement by using a combination of bombs and threats.

Many of Chechnya's 420 villages are being ordered to sign three-way peace agreements with the Russian military and the Chechen government.



Spring offensive: A Russian soldier fighting near Grozny as the Kremlin stepped up its battle against rebel forces. Photograph: Yuri Turov/Reuters

the pro-Russian Chechen authorities. The documents require elders to hand over all weapons in the village and to agree to expel any separatist fighters in their midst.

Those who co-operate receive a promise from the Russians that they will not attack unless the agreement is breached. As one diplomat put it: "It is like saying: 'If you sign this agreement, we won't kill you.'"

The Chechens are well aware of the dire consequences of incurring Russia's wrath. A reminder came when the 58th Army tore into Sernovodsk last week, looting and rampaging through the village, which had already been bombed heavily, reducing a mosque to rubble. Houses were stripped bare, shot up, and burnt. Media and aid workers were barred.

The Russians said that the attack was to flush out rebels. But the mayor, Boris Kiev, claims there were none - not least because he already had an agreement with the Russians not to allow any fighters into town. "I now wish I had invited the fighters in," he said, after escaping his village by swimming across a river. "I was unable to help my brothers and sisters because I believed the Russian propaganda."

His remarks illustrate a phenomenon that is occurring across the war zone. The point of forcing villages to sign agreements appears to be to isolate the rebels, and to allow the Kremlin to tell Russian voters that peace has been restored in Chechnya. But the effect is the opposite: anti-Russian opinion is growing stronger, including among opponents of the rebel leader, Dzhokhar Dudayev. With this comes greater support for outright independence - a status that the Kremlin is unwilling to grant Chechnya.

Chechens on both sides complain about the Russian presence, accusing the military of failing to distinguish between rebels and ordinary citizens.

The deputy prime minister of the Chechen government claims that Moscow's troops have been looting, disarming police and detaining ordinary people. For months stories have circulated of the horrors of Russian filtration camps. So, too, have allegations that the Russians are refusing to allow any men between the ages of 14 and 55 to escape from villages which they bombard.

All this fuels the hatred of Russia. "Even the people who were pro-Russian simply because they hated Dudayev so much are reduced to total despair now by the situation," said Roman Wasilewski, of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe. "They have seen that the Russians coming in makes things unbelievably worse, worse even than their worst nightmares."

Unsurprisingly, this view has been taken hold along the muddy lanes of Katyr-Yurt. The elders were last week puzzling over how they could ever find the 100 guns that the Russian general demanded. Only last year, they handed in more than 50 as part of a peace accord. Now they say they are raising funds to buy some more to hand in weapons that they expect to acquire via a middle-man from the Russian army, whose hungry and ill-paid soldiers sell arms for food.

And while Mr Yeltsin's strategy may help convince Russians outside the Caucasus that he is doing the right thing, the village mayor, Mr Bashayev, is not impressed. Some five decades after his people were deported en masse by Stalin, he says he would now like to see a Communist in the Kremlin.

PEOPLE

Whither Lech Windsor

Kazimierz Jagiellon
could have a lot to say for. The 15th-century Polish king is not as familiar to those of our children who still learn about kings and queens as Richard III. Yet he is an ancestor not only of our Queen but of her husband, one would suggest that a double dose of Polish get could be a significant factor in the tendency of some members of the Queen's family to self-destruct. Nevertheless, there is something in the chemistry of the Queen's imminent trip to Poland that smacks of those nasty and obscure family quarrels known more for their consequences than for their origins.

Lech Walesa, the former president who has long thought of himself as King of Poland and therefore also related to Kazimierz, Elizabeth and Philip, has not yet replied to an invitation to meet the Queen at a lunch at the Hotel Bristol in Warsaw, on Tuesday.

The explanation being put about is that he is refusing to come within spitting distance of the man who usurped his throne, the former communist Aleksander Kwasniewski. An alternative version now heard in Warsaw is that he is waiting till the Queen acknowledges that they share the same royal blood and starts to invite him to those family conferences on that grand ongoing theme, Whither the Windsors?

Male chauvinism may have been driven to those sad corners of the planet where rainforest husbands come home from a hard day's hunting expecting the wife to be ready with the pipe and slippers. But victory on earth is not the end of the story. When the American astronaut Shannon Lucid visits the Mir space station - she is due to blast off on the shuttle Atlantis today - the Russians waiting for her will expect her to keep the place clean and tidy.

"We anticipate that the fans will be taken care of in a more timely manner, because we know that women love to clean," said General Yuri Glazkov, deputy commander of the Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Centre. Ms Lucid, 53, is a biochemist and one of NASA's original female astronauts.

For all the myths of female equality under communism, the Russians are slow in changing their attitudes. Svetlana Savitskaya was presented with an apron by her male colleagues when she arrived in 1982 at the Salyut space station, and the British chemist Helen Sharman had to listen to her Mir commander complain in 1991 that space flight is "hard work, not a woman's work".

A man with a more subtle appreciation of the role of women is Musa Komeagac, the Turkish writer who married the 13-year-old Essex girl Sarah Cook. The lower story has been turned into a four-part television film by the Turkish ATV channel, with the groom playing himself. Mr Komeagac, who has become a celebrity in his homeland, was paid \$8,600 by ATV, which will broadcast the series next month. "My only intention is to show everyone how much I love Sarah," he said from his home in Kahramanmaraş. Mr Komeagac was jailed on charges of having sex with a minor then released pending trial next month. He faces up to 10 months in prison.

James Roberts

IN BRIEF

General Motors strikes deal to end strike
Canton, Ohio - General Motors Corp and the United Auto Workers Union reached a tentative agreement yesterday to end a strike that crippled the car-maker's production, the union said. The strike closed 26 of GM's 29 assembly plants.

Marshall finds lost Russian explorer
Moscow - A US Coast Guard plane yesterday spotted a Russian explorer and his two sons who became lost in a blizzard while on a ski across the Bering Strait.

Man seeks forgiveness for fire
Manila - The owner of a Manila disco where 151 people died in the Philippines' biggest fire disaster pleaded for forgiveness and said it was "a freak accident". Hermilio Ocampo presented himself to the police to deny he had gone into hiding.

Nigeria welcomes rights observers
Lagos - Nigeria yesterday welcomed a United Nations plan to send a mission to look into the trial and execution of a dissident leader and eight other Nigerian activists, and to study the military government's promise to restore democracy.

Papandreu defies odds to leave hospital
Athens - The former Greek prime minister and Socialist party leader, Andreas Papandreu, defied the odds yesterday, leaving hospital after a four-month stay during which he hovered near death and was forced to resign.

Egyptian exorcists jailed for killing girl
Cairo - A court in northern Egypt sentenced four members of an ill Muslim fundamentalist group to 10 years in jail with hard labour yesterday for killing a 10-year-old girl they were trying to rescue.

Police suspects held during full moon
Moscow - Fearing another mass suicide, 200 police officers conducted a sweep of suspected members of a doomsday cult, detaining six people. Police said 50 people were questioned in the operation, which coincided with the full moon.

Guns fall silent in Guatemala truce

PHIL DAVISON
Latin America Correspondent

One of the modern world's longest guerrilla wars, the 35-year-old Guatemalan insurgency, could soon be over after the government and left-wing rebels separately declared an open-ended truce.

In a goodwill gesture ahead of peace talks next week, the guerrillas of the National Revolutionary Unity of Guatemala group said they would "temporarily suspend all offensive military operations" and fight only if attacked by the army. It was the first time they had declared an indefinite ceasefire, rather than one pegged to a specific event such as the recent presidential elections or last month's visit by the Pope.

President Alvaro Arzu, who took office in January, immediately responded by ordering the army to hold its fire. He was travelling to the Ixcán highland region yesterday, one of the zones of most intense fighting in past years, to ensure the troops got the message and complied.

The ceasefire appeared to reflect a new trust between government and rebels since Mr Arzu, a 50-year-old former travel agent of part-Russian extraction, took office. He has pledged to end the conflict by the summer.

The Guatemalan conflict, initially a civil war pitting poverty-stricken Mayan Indians against a ruthless army and a wealthy elite, is the last remaining guerrilla insurgency of many which have plagued Central America. An estimated 100,000 Guatemalans are known to have been killed while a further 40,000 "disappeared".

Most of the deaths and disappearances were blamed on the army which largely crushed the rebels in the early Eighties with a "scorched-earth" policy of burning down entire Indian villages to flush out the rebels and discourage their supporters.

Since the Generals stood down, and democracy was restored in 1986, the conflict has been little more than a nuisance to most Guatemalans, with rebels blocking highways and blowing up electricity pylons.

But it has retained symbolic importance for the poor, indigenous population in whose name the rebels fought.

While rarely taking on the army in recent years, the guerrillas have maintained political influence in remote areas, financing themselves with millions of dollars in "war tax" extorted from ranchers and other sources. Some Guatemalans fear that, even after a peace agreement, some rebels may continue to rule the roost in highland areas, living off the proceeds of extortion.

Serbs vent their fury against US diplomat

JOVANA GEC
Associated Press

Vukovar - Angry Serbs cursed the US ambassador to the United Nations, Madeleine Albright, and her motorcade was stoned when she toured the last Serb-held area of Croatia yesterday.

The incident happened when Ms Albright, whose outspoken approach has led Serbs to consider her their biggest American enemy, took a walk on the streets of Vukovar, a Serb-held town in eastern Croatia, which was shelled into ruins by the Yugoslav army in late 1991.

Angry Serbs shouted: "You bitch", "Go back to Croatia", and "You fascist", when Ms Albright reached an open-air market in Vukovar. She soon returned to her car as the crowd started stoning the motorcade. Two windows were broken in one of the cars accompanying Ms Albright. There were no injuries.

Ms Albright played down the incident, saying it did not reflect the general atmosphere, and that the leadership is still committed to the peace process.

Vukovar and the surrounding area is to be peacefully handed back to Croatia within two years, according to an agreement reached last year.

Meanwhile, it was announced yesterday that a suspected mass grave has been found in a deep cave in north-west Bosnia, near one of the worst Serb death camps. Investigators say it could contain the remains of up to 120 Muslims and Croats.

To conceal the grave, someone threw the bodies of animals and rubbish on top of the human remains and set off an explosion at the cave, a Bosnian war crimes researcher says.

The Bosnian government war crimes committee, which found the site, near the village of Lucei Palanka, said the animal remains were a ploy by the Serbs to mask the cave's horrors.

A videotape shows the inside of a deep cave containing piles of bones. One of the researchers was shown holding what he said was part of a human spine.

Another Bosnian war crimes researcher, Refik Hodzic, said: "The problem is that the site of the cave has been ruined by a big detonation... by whoever tried to cover the traces of this crime," he said. The cave is near Omarska, one of the most notorious Serb-run camps during the war. The detention camp was closed in late 1992, following an international outcry over pictures of emaciated inmates. Experts say 11,500 people are still missing from Omarska.

Pride and prejudice at heart of German dilemma

RAH HELM
Augsburg

the Bavarian march struck Hilde Kutzitz clapped her gingham and threw her arms towards the man being on to the stage. Along with 2,000 others, Mrs Kutzitz came to hear for herself at Karl-Heinz Schneider, candidate to be mayor, would for Augsburg, 30 miles west of the Bavarian capital, Munich. We want someone who understands our problems -

who knows us, who we know and can trust," she said. "We are fed up with the politicians far away, they cannot help."

Around her, the crowd was cheering. Mr Schneider was talking of the town's loss of jobs, of immigration and new cheap labour coming into Germany from eastern Europe.

He spoke of the need to build new industry and roads. The problems he raised are the problems facing Europeans everywhere. But not once did Mr Schneider mention

THE JOYS (AND OTHERWISE) OF WORKING IN A MODERN OFFICE...

THE OLIVER & CLAIRE STRIP

BUILDING EUROPE

"Europe". Europe is not a vote-winner in Bavaria.

Germany, Bavarians complain, is paying for the rest of Europe. And they fear plans for a single currency. "What will happen to the Deutschmark? What about my savings?" asked an elderly woman. "Brussels can do nothing for ordinary people," said Alfred Ebert, a retired textile worker. "We have lost thousands of jobs in Augsburg."

"We have to fight for Bavaria. We are a kingdom. King Ludwig II is here in our hearts," declared the manager of the bar, pointing to a badge of his hero, King pinned to his Lederhosen.

Such displays of nationalist sentiment, combined with open scepticism about Europe, are a recent phenomenon in Germany. Germans have always believed that their post-war future

as Europe's biggest power, living at peace with its neighbours, could only be secured as part of political and economic union. If the fears pronounced in an Augsburg beer-ten suggest that the European consensus is collapsing, then Europe's leaders should take note.

It is no surprise that Germany's suspicions of Europe should erupt most virulently in Bavaria. Known as the Texas of Germany, the "free state" of Bavaria, twice the size of Belgium, has always defended its independence, and boasts that it existed as an entity well before France or Germany.

After the Second World War the region was still largely agrarian, but fought hard to build up its prosperity as a centre of the motor industry and high-tech engineering. These days, the neon signs for BMW, Siemens and Mercedes are as much a part of Munich's skyline as the onion domes and spires.

Now, however, as elsewhere in Germany, unemployment is rising, reaching 15 per cent in certain pockets. Companies are

relocating to escape the effects of the strong mark and to take advantage of cheap labour.

Siemens has cut 20,000 jobs in the last two years, launching 30 joint ventures in China, and new plants in eastern Europe. BMW has opened a plant in South Carolina, as well as plants in eastern Europe, and it has plans for a factory in Vietnam.

The people feel at the mercy of decision-makers far away, whether they be directors of multi-national companies, bureaucrats in Brussels, or even the government in Bonn.

There is little doubt that anxiety about the single currency is the prime source of concern. Bavarians are not so much "anti-European" as fearful of where Europe is leading. Few have anything good to say about sinking a strong mark into an uncertain monetary union.

With its long eastern border, Bavaria always saw the political value of European integration, as a safeguard against communism. Yet they are also swift to say that, if Germany were really to face a new military threat from the east, the country would look to the US - not Europe - for ultimate protection.

In principle, Bavaria supports the EU's plans to accept new members among its eastern European neighbours as a means of furthering stability. At the same time, however, there is deep anxiety about economic competition. "My farmers are already not happy," says Mr Bocklet, citing 20 per cent loss of income during last year's devaluation of the Italian lire. "Poland already produces as many potatoes as the EU put together - and at half the cost."

Porcelain and textile factories in the region have been put out of business by competitors to the east, and there are constant fears about immigration.

Bavaria has taken in nearly half the 300,000 refugees who fled to Germany from the former Yugoslavia. "Immigration Foreign policy. These are areas where the EU should act. But on these issues, it does nothing," says Heinz Mitterdorfer at the regional council.

For ordinary Bavarians, the frustrations point to the need to switch back power for their regions. All the German states already insist on scrutinising EU legislation, each having an office in Brussels, but for Bavaria this is no longer good enough. There must be "bottom-up" federalism, they say.

The state has even put its own paper to the inter-governmental conference starting in Bonn next week, calling for new limits on Brussels' powers under the "subsidiarity" rules.

"You must understand we are not nationalists," says Mr Bocklet. "That is a very bad word here. But we are close to our culture to our Bavarian roots. We do not need a political union by integration - we have common interest." On that point, even John Major, who proposes a "partnership of nations", might agree.

Bavaria: the region where German suspicions of the European Union have erupted most violently

As the man who... slice of the prom...

A...

To Walworth from Wash...



Sorry, that's the wrong sort of...

As the man who says he invented the Walkman fights on for a slice of the profits, **Peter Popham** analyses its mass appeal

A walk on the private side

The Court of Appeal yesterday threw out Andreas Pavel's claim to be the father of the Walkman, and with it his attempt to cut himself a slice of Sony's corporate fortune. With this decision, the British leg of Pavel's epic legal battle is probably over (his lawyers have 30 days to decide whether or not to appeal to the House of Lords). But next month battle will commence in the United States.

Pavel, 49, youngest son of a wealthy German industrialist, patented a version of the personal stereo in 1977, two years before Sony launched the Walkman. Pavel's device (see the diagram, right) consists of a sort of Browning belt from which hang tape player and cases for batteries and cassettes. He claims to have dreamt it up on a walking holiday in the French Alps in 1972. He had prototypes made up by engineers and raved about the "psychological effect" of listening to music on the device. "All of a sudden, everything around you begins to move to the music," he says that he told a Sony employee about his device, and that the idea was stolen from him.

Sony went on to make more than 150 million Walkmans, and is still producing more than a million a month; the device has earned the company at least £2bn, according to conservative estimates. Pavel went on to a life of tireless litigation, exhausting his £1m inheritance in the attempt to prove his point.

The closest he has come to success was when Sony paid him a £50,000 fee to use the so-called "Talking feature", which allows someone to talk to the listener. But further success that would bring him a royalty from Sony's earnings, which could be worth tens of millions of pounds, continues to elude him. The appeal judges supported the opinion of the original trial that Pavel's idea was "obvious" and "lacked novelty", and that his original patent was therefore invalid.

Yet Pavel's lonely and quixotic struggle has drawn attention to a small, humble, technologically insignificant device that sneaked into our lives nearly 20 years ago. It is difficult now to cast ourselves imaginatively into a time when it did not exist. When a poster of the film *Withnail & I* appeared recently with one of the protagonists wearing a Walkman, it took a while before somebody pointed out that it was 10 years out of time.

Pavel may indeed have devised a personal stereo as early as he claims: there is nothing original or remarkable about the technology it uses. But the belief that such a device could appeal to a vast market was a strictly Japanese one. Its invention and marketing were a triumph—the greatest triumph to date—of Japanese aesthetic values over Western civiliza-

tion. The only comparable event was the arrival in Europe in the 1860s of Japanese *ukyo-e* prints, and the convulsions these brought about in the ideas and techniques of European painters.

The Walkman emerged from the modern Japanese preoccupation with the small, the light and the compact. The phrase in Japanese is *keihaku tansho*, literally "thin and light, convenient and small", and it encompasses most of the electronics products by which Japan has made its mark on the West. The concepts themselves are rooted in the cramped, congested surroundings of Japanese life, and the need to devise products that will work in such environments. "Miniaturisation and compactness have always

The first sensational success of Sony's *keihaku tansho* thinking was the transistor radio. The transistor itself was developed in Bell's famously inventive laboratories in the United States. But Bell could see no use for it beyond hearing aids, and was happy to license it to Sony.

The first such radio came on to the market in 1955. So closely did it become identified with Japan that President de Gaulle later derided Japan's visiting prime minister as a "transistor radio salesman".

But the success of the Walkman is more interesting and has a deeper cultural significance than the miniature radio. The transistor was just a big radio made small; the Walkman was

Walkman was a great commercial success, to rely upon that success to support invention is fallacious. In other words, it was a triumph not of technology but of vision.

The genesis of the Walkman has entered the realm of myth. Aside from Pavel's account of simple theft, there are at least three versions of how Morita dreamt it up. According to one, he wanted to listen to music while playing tennis, and instructed his engineers to come up with something that would permit him to do so. In another, he observed Sony's co-founder, Masaru Ibuka, staggering from room to room under the weight of a conventional tape recorder so that he could have music wherever he went, and Morita took pity on him. In the third, it was a question of shutting up the kids' rock music at home.

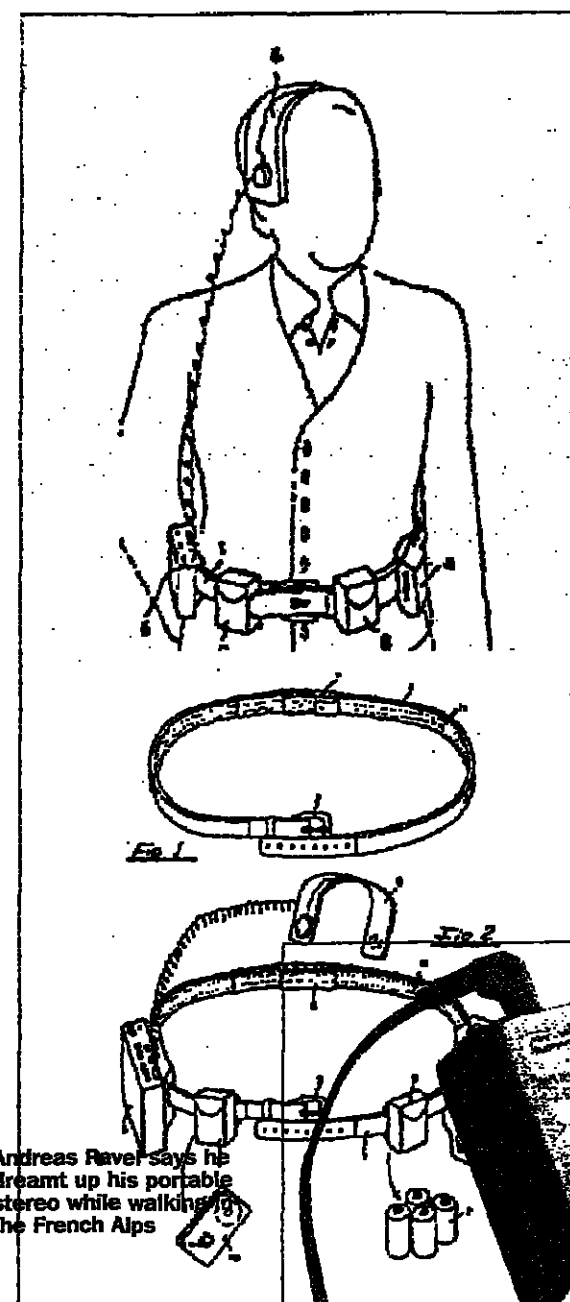
Whichever is correct, it betrays a peculiarly modern Japanese urge to shut oneself away, beyond the reach of an increasingly peering, intrusive, rickety world. Love hotels, karaoke boxes, capsule hotels and hand-held televisions all testify to the same need: visual reality headssets are perhaps the closest the concept has been taken to perfection.

The Walkman was always a more readily accepted proposition in the Japanese city, where shutting oneself away has long been the preferred method of resistance to a world of tightly packed strangers. This is why Japanese train passengers blithely read pornographic comics, or sleep, or pick their noses, oblivious to those around them. The Walkman simply made the solitude more complete, more easily attained.

But in the West it posed problems: not just noise, but also a simmering sense of insult, indignation that people should excommunicate themselves from the community so simply and completely. What if there were an accident, if somebody were hurt or in need of directions? The man with the Walkman was morally absent.

The anger which that absence prompted explains the cheer that greeted the tabloid story of the commuter who severed his noisy neighbour's Walkman cord with scissors. You may dispatch yourself to oblivion, the story said, but you are quite readily reeled back in again. Both the anger and the snipping would have been unthinkable in Japan.

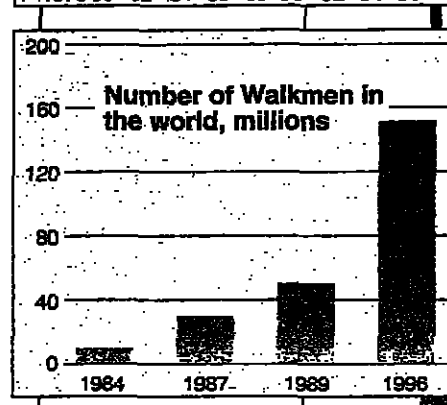
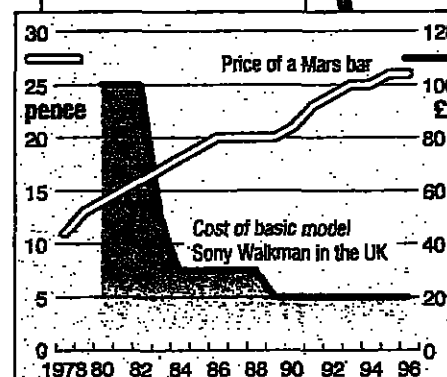
But gradually over the past 17 years we have become inured to these insults to our sense of community: our sense of community itself is diminished as a result. The absent presence of the Walkman is now taken for granted, as an alternative (and eminently understandable) way of existing in society, part in, part out. In this subtle way, we truly have turned Japanese.



Great patent wars of the past

1873-1880: between 1868 and 1900, America issued 756 patents designs for barbed wire. One barbed device sparked seven years of litigation when three pioneer barbed-wire inventors each applied for patent within four months of one another. **1971-1973:** John Alan Ross, an American engineer, was named the true inventor of the electronic digital computer when the computer giant Honeywell unearthed his work while preparing defence against patent infringement charges from its rivals Sperry Rand. **1985-1992:** a Worcestershire farm Alan Brazier, received a seven-figure sum when he beat Hoover in court over a patent infringement. Yes, a revolutionary carpet-cleaner conceived by Brazier in 1968, is now an £85m business. **1987-1990:** invented 350 years ago, the corkscrew was at the centre of a case between Screwpull makers Hallett Company and Brabantia. Screwpull was patented in America in 1978, but is very different from the invention of the Birmingham engineer Sir Edward Thomas in 1802. Hallett lost the case. **1995-1996:** Breton Yves Renault designed an oyster-opening device only to find his fortune delayed by litigation between oyster-cultivators to whom he sold a licence to exploit the patent and the subcontracted opener developers F2.

Andreas Pavel says he dreamt up his portable stereo while walking in the French Alps



The case against the personal stereo

Although the personal stereo has enhanced person freedom and allowed people to listen to music on the move, it has also had drawbacks, mainly through alleged damage to hearing and the invasion of other people's personal space.

November 1992: the British Tinnitus Association calls for health warnings on personal stereos. **December 1992:** a fed-up commuter travelling from London's Liverpool Street station to Norwich is applauded by fellow travellers after he cuts through the headphones of a teenage traveller, Lizzie King, a passenger, spoke for her companions. The pounding beat had been going on for 20 minutes. He was just gobsmacked. He sat there staring at the severed cables.

3 September 1993: launch of the Sound, Noise and Hearing campaign that warns children of the risk of ear damage and tinnitus as a result of listening to loud music. David Mervin, a leading University specialist and co-author of the education pack issued by the Health and Safety Commission and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents, says: "A two-thirds volume a Walkman is equivalent to something between operating a chainsaw and a garden strimmer." At full volume, a personal stereo is equivalent to listening to a road with no ear protection.

16 March 1994: a poster warns of the dangers of personal stereos when it depicts a car accident on a road with no ear protection. A 20-year-old jogger, who was listening to music on his headphones, was hit by a car while listening to music on his headphones.

1 September 1994: Andrew Dunn, a student who refuses to turn down the volume on his personal stereo when asked to do so by fellow train passengers, is fined £200 by magistrates in York. When Dunn told the court: "It was the typical personal stereo sound, noisy and noisy." **16 March 1996:** France prepares to ban personal stereos that exceed 100 decibels, a level of sound which can cause hearing damage. A generation of deaf people.

appealed to the Japanese," says Akio Morita, the co-founder and former chairman of Sony, who credits himself with inventing the Walkman. "Our boxes have been made to nest into one another, our fans to fold, our art rolls into neat scrolls."

The early products of Morita's company were very different: their first tape recorder, painstakingly copied from an American model, was a monster weighing 100lbs. But as a new face in a Japanese electronics field already dominated by firms such as Matsushita, the company behind brands such as Panasonic and Technics, Sony's only hope of success was to do that most un-Japanese thing—invent. And it did this by developing a nose for products that would fit into Japanese lives a little more delicately than a 100lb tape recorder.

a public activity rendered almost completely private. The Walkman meant that for a small price, anyone could temporarily block out the public realm, retreat to their own cave, wherever they might happen to be in reality.

For some it was a liberator, turning long boring train or plane journeys into opportunities for musical ecstasy. For others, though, especially those trapped on Tube trains next to deaf hip-hop enthusiasts, it was a frightening short cut to social autism.

The crucial fact about the Walkman, what led to Pavel's appeal being dismissed yesterday, is that the personal stereo is technologically "obvious" and therefore does not amount to an invention—and that its huge success does not alter this fact. In the judgment's words, "Although the

should be one referendum or two (one on the principle of change and one to choose which system). But Labour's domestic policy committee had made one firm decision, he revealed. "The only policy we have is that we will call them referendums rather than referenda," he said.

In the family way

As exclusively predicted in these here columns two months ago, Peter Gummer (below) has moved from being the man in charge of the Arts Council's lottery board to being the chairman of the Royal Opera House. To put it another way, the man who recommended that the Royal Opera House receive £55m will now be in charge of the board that is in charge of spending it.

I gather that the Prime Minister personally approved the appointment of Mr Gummer, brother of John Selwyn. And, as Peter Gummer told me reassuringly: "I was chairman of a non-executive group at the Arts Council. It was the council as a whole which actually made the decisions." I only regret there is not a new series of *The House* on television to record the dramas of this non-executive transfer.

Let them eat beef

On the menu of the press gallery caffen at the House of Commons yesterday: roast sirloin of beef, £1.70; the House authorities are certainly determined to make the cynical reporters eat their words. And it looks like they are. "It's going very well," says a source close to the kitchen.

Eagle Eye

To Walworth, love from Washington

They say one of the first indications of an opposition party being taken seriously is when foreign governments start having



ing secret dealings with it. In which case I have news that may alarm Mr Major a little. A confidential fax has come into my possession in which a first secretary at the American embassy gave Labour's Northern Ireland spokeswoman, Mo Mowlam (above), precise details of Gerry Adams' itinerary in America earlier this month. With Ms Mowlam also visiting America, an unplanned collision between the two could have been embarrassing.

Perhaps, with Tony Blair visiting President Clinton next month, the Americans are keen to build closer relations with Her Majesty's Opposition. Perhaps they think it won't be Her Majesty's Opposition much longer.

I wondered aloud to the sender of the fax at the American embassy whether this was true, but he took fright and said he couldn't say anything at all about the fax and then rang off. He must have had another appointment. Dr Mowlam's office was also otherwise engaged. I suppose secret faxes come under the heading of "special relationship".

Sorry, that's the wrong sort of excuse

British Rail's excuses—or should that be Railtrack's excuses—for the absence of trains grow ever more impressive. The West Anglia (whose sense of geography is as bad as everything else) Great Northern line into King's Cross has had a particularly shabby couple of months, which has been acknowledged by posters of apology in the stations. But

DIARY

nothing—not falling leaves, not the wrong sort of snow, not even slippery rails—has topped the excuse offered by the harassed ticket clerk at the village station in Knebworth this week. "I can't say when the next train to London will be. I'm afraid. Someone has stolen the overhead cables."

Is this the politics of plurality?

Robin Cook, the Shadow Cabinet's chief advocate of electoral reform, is also in charge of Labour's policy-making machine. So Labour's electoral reformers were keen to hear from him at their

Worshipping images

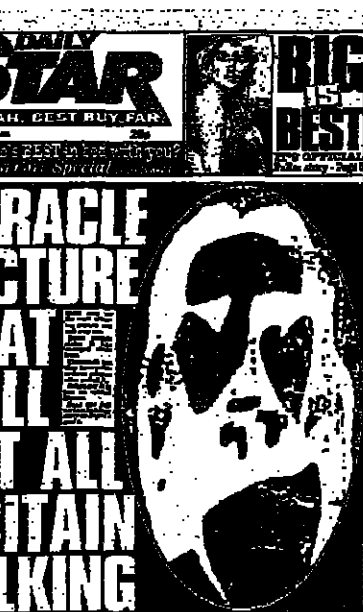
Some may have doubts about the Star's Starboard, but who could argue with the *Daily Star*? This week the tabloid has produced more sensational "images", such as the alleged head of Jesus, the alleged picture of Jesus on his knees, and the alleged picture of Jesus on his knees. The allegedly enlightening "images" are only supposed to work if you stare hard at them for 30 seconds, then concentrate your eyes on a white surface. Slowly, the face of Jesus will appear to you.

It has left *Star* readers with a "bizarre sensation" and some sort of feeling of "unbearable warmth". Even sent Elizabeth Barrett from North London hurrying back to church after 10 years of exile. She says: "I was aapsed Roman Catholic for 10 years, but now I keep seeing his face everywhere." Paul Shorrocks from Blackpool says: "I almost choked on my own sputum when I saw it."

Only there may be less to it than meets the eye. Dr John Tiffany from the National Laboratory of Ophthalmology at Oxford University tells me the picture may be no more than an optical illusion. "It's simply playing on the ability of the eye to saturate an image," he says. "I remember something similar in one of my *Boy Wonder* books."

annual get-together on Wednesday. But he had little to report. So far, Labour promises only to hold a referendum on changing the voting system. He could not comment on reports that Tony Blair was moving towards support for electoral reform, he said, except to remark that Peter Mandelson, the MP for Hartlepool, was a "proper and adequate metaphor" for the Labour leader. And Mr Mandelson has just announced his partial conversion to the cause. (It is as "a proper and adequate metaphor" for the Labour leader that Eagle Eye shall henceforth refer to Mr Mandelson.)

Mr Cook said that none of the details of the referendum commitment had been decided, such as whether there



should be one referendum or two (one on the principle of change and one to choose which system). But Labour's domestic policy committee had made one firm decision, he revealed. "The only policy we have is that we will call them referendums rather than referenda," he said.

In the family way

As exclusively predicted in these here columns two months ago, Peter Gummer (below) has moved from being the man in charge of the Arts Council's lottery board to being the chairman of the Royal Opera House. To put it another way, the man who recommended that the Royal Opera House receive £55m will now be in charge of the board that is in charge of spending it.

I gather that the Prime Minister personally approved the appointment of Mr Gummer, brother of John Selwyn. And, as Peter Gummer told me reassuringly: "I was chairman of a non-executive group at the Arts Council. It was the council as a whole which actually made the decisions." I only regret there is not a new series of *The House* on television to record the dramas of this non-executive transfer.

Let them eat beef

On the menu of the press gallery caffen at the House of Commons yesterday: roast sirloin of beef, £1.70; the House authorities are certainly determined to make the cynical reporters eat their words. And it looks like they are. "It's going very well," says a source close to the kitchen.

Eagle Eye

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INDEPENDENT

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The potential for peace, or trouble

urely can a politician have been accused of selling out so many for the sake of so few. Yesterday's announcement of plans for elections in Northern Ireland, the way for all-party peace talks, is greeted with a wave of accusation and counter-accusation. The truth is that the onists, for all their hot air, are quite good with the proposals. The Irish government gave them a muted welcome, and nationalist outrage is as fierce as it was last time. The proposed compromise near the election procedure is sensible. The problem is not with that but the role of the 110-seat Forum that voters will be voting on. Mr Major's account of that role is a veritable risked further alienating already alienated nationalists. The election process will be complicated. Parties will field a different shortlist of candidates in each of Northern Ireland's 18 constituencies. Voters will choose the list they prefer. A top-up system will ensure that the 10 favourite parties will get two more representatives, but this is not the most important attribute of the proposals. The purpose of these elections is to ease the parties into a new relationship. That is the standard by which they should be measured. The voting method itself should prove an obstacle to talks. In advocating different electoral systems each party has been trying to maximise their representation. The Democratic Unionists and the DUP, with their high-profile leaders, should have benefited from a presidential election in which each voter chose the party they wanted in a single Ulster-wide constituency. The Ulster Unionists would have come out better under a Westminster style election. The Government's compromise was bound to upset, but it provides reasonably fair representation for all parties.

The same cannot be said, unfortunately, of the elected body to be set up. The plan is for every party represented in the Forum to send a negotiating team to the talks - with the exception of Sinn Féin if the IRA ceasefire is not restored. However, the Forum will continue to exist after negotiations are under way and that will not improve the prospects for peace. The two main Unionist parties are likely to command a majority of the seats. Like every Northern Ireland Assembly that has preceded it, it will quickly become the symbol of the Unionist majority. This is what the nationalists fear.

In theory the Forum will remain independent of the negotiation process. But the Government admits that the negotiators could decide to draw it in. With those few words the Prime Minister has raised the spectre for the nationalists of the unionists deciding to involve a Unionist controlled Forum in the peace process. Fear of a return to majority-based decision making was exactly what led the SDLP to oppose these elections in the first place. Even more important, the prospect of the Forum lessens Sinn Féin's chances of persuading the IRA to resume the ceasefire.

The Government should make it clear that the Forum will definitely be excluded from the negotiation process unless every party agrees to its involvement. Unless they are firm about the limits on the Forum they will make negotiations difficult, consensus unlikely, and they will reduce the chances for peace.

The end of civic Christianity

The Methodists have gone public with a gloomy picture of their future. Without revivalist fervour of a kind the Church has not seen in a century - which could take divine intervention - the Methodist church will die off. It's not one. The fall in the numbers of Methodists is reflected across the established churches. Protestantism in Britain has reached its end game.

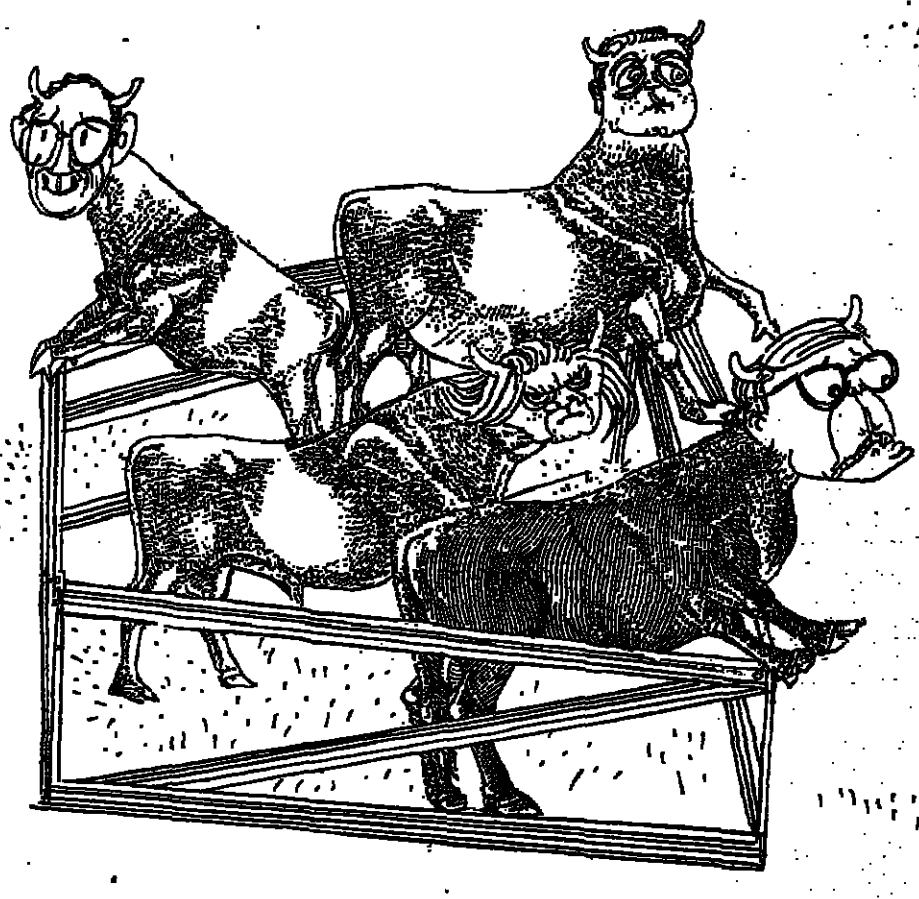
The consequences go wider than the decline of one denomination. A pillar of British identity is crumbling. Methodism is a tradition of outward-going, practical-minded faith has been a vital source of moral values and social ideals. How will the springs of civic action and social concern be replenished once Methodism is gone?

For the Methodists, as for the Baptists and the United Reformed Church, the figures are grim. Methodism recruited 9,071 new members in the past three years, but lost 22,460. More worrying, however, 30,813 members died. The number of Methodists under 25 has shrunk by one-fifth. Churches are closing at the rate of almost two a week. Church demography is not much better for the Anglicans or the Roman Catholics, either. Attendance at Sunday worship in Anglican churches is broadly stable at about 1.1 million. However, the state church's age structure is similar to that of the other denominations: Christian worship and church membership are old people's activities. Some children come to Sunday school, but once they hit their teens they drop away and never return.

Push the curve of membership forward into the next century and the mainstream Christian church - the denominations with hierarchical and centralised structures - effectively come to an end. In contrast, the decentralised, theologically promiscuous fringe churches, often lumped together as "fundamentalist" show signs of vitality. But few of them show the wide, generous engagement with politics and society that, at its best, characterised Methodism.

What the Methodist meltdown symbolises is the end of civic Christianity. Years before there were Victorian values, John Wesley took his movement across industrialising Britain, establishing a personal faith linked to social purpose. Methodism, in a sense, helped provide the industrialised modern world a sense of spirituality and moral purpose. No wonder the historical cliché behind the rise of the Labour Party has been that it owed more to Methodism than Marx.

This is the broad tradition of Christian socialism into which Tony Blair has been trying to tap as he fashions new Labour. His problem is that this tradition no longer has much of a social basis. Mrs Thatcher could appeal to a new generation of gung-ho entrepreneurs to carry forward her revolution. Mr Blair faces an uphill struggle to find an equivalent constituency to be the bearers of his values. Methodism helped to provide the industrialised modern world with a sense of spirituality and moral purpose. There is no latter-day equivalent as Britain's moves into the world of the infotainment global economy. A values gap yawns before us.



Corralled

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

BSE: who will care for the thousands of victims?

Sir: As the organisation that offers support and information to the families of people with Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, we are appalled by the prospect of an epidemic of infected people (reports, 21 March).

Professor John Pattison, chairman of SEAC, the government-appointed expert committee on BSE, says that up to 500,000 people may have been infected before the bovine offal ban in 1989.

The Government failed to act at the earliest possible opportunity to put sufficient funds into research. It is essential we know how this disease develops in humans and to what extent it can be passed from person to person. We are concerned there are few facilities in the UK to carry out such transmission studies.

The members of our network, and the 650,000 people in this country who suffer other forms of dementia such as Alzheimer's disease, know that care in the community is ill-equipped to look after these people in future. Those of us at the sharp end of community care, who are looking after people with dementia, have been a soft target for health

cuts in the past. In particular health authorities have failed to provide for the 17,000 younger people with dementia to which the new cases of CJD will be added.

The Government owes it to the people who have become infected to prepare sufficiently and commit enough funding to care services to make their last months as dignified as possible.

CLIVE EVERS
Chairman
Creutzfeldt-Jakob Support Network
Alzheimer's Disease Society
London SW1

with us despite the adoption of measures designed to wipe out the disease in a few years. Admittedly it has now (just) peaked, but much later than was confidently predicted. It would seem therefore either that the infective model used to determine the measures is wrong, or that those measures are being inadequately implemented. What a surprise, then, to hear that the official position has changed from "no evidence of a link with CJD" to "very low risk".

Is the ministry now prepared to take responsibility for the ensuing catastrophic loss of confidence in our beef industry?

CHRISTOPHER FORSEY
Northwich, Cheshire

Sir: The behaviour of the Ministry of Agriculture when addressing a threat to the general population rather than the agricultural industry reinforces my already jaundiced view of its motives.

An outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease, which has the potential to ravage cattle stocks, is treated with utmost rigour. The presence of BSE merely requires the affected cattle to be destroyed, presumably because the disease is much less of a danger to cows.

Nevertheless, BSE remains

Sir: Another press uproar about BSE and the health risks of eating beef.

Is it not true that the motor car kills thousands of people each year? Should it too be banned in order to save lives?

I think that it is time that the responsible press undertook some elementary risk assessment of the whole issue of BSE instead of continuing to undermine and destroy one section of a great British industry.

J R ELLIOTT
Southwell, Nottinghamshire

Sir: Nature seems to have a way of telling us when we have pushed the boundaries too far. "Mad cow disease" comes after 200 years of applying to the production of beef our determination to have everything we want, and as much of it as we can cram into our mouths.

Beef eaters happily ignore the ecological consequences of cattle herding - the devastation of huge

Sir: The people, says Roger Pyrah (Letters, 20 March), voted for a common union with Europe believing that the country would retain its political independence. If they did that they were remarkably stupid although, to be fair, politicians of 1975 did a very good job in conveying that impression.

In fact we chose to leave EFTA, which was organised precisely the way Mr Pyrah describes, to join the EEC, the federal destiny of which was plain to be seen by anyone bothering to look.

At the same time we displayed a callous disregard for Commonwealth friends whom we had induced to develop single-commodity economies based on supplying us with raw materials and food. Today EFTA is no more and the Commonwealth link is greatly weakened yet we remain an overpopulated island heavily dependent on imported food for survival. Prudence therefore dictates that, having made our bed, we should lie on it.

In 1975 I voted to leave the EEC before it was too late. Today I would vote to stay in and for a single currency. The federal institutions do, however, need to be made more democratically accountable. The Commission should be made subordinate to the Parliament.

J A DAVIS
Bookham, Surrey

Sir: To suggest that the English merely pretended that the Irish were wild and uncivilised in order to justify invading their country ("Irish but of English racism for more than eight centuries", 20 March) is to make the mistake of imposing modern values on the past.

The English really did believe that the Irish were a backward people. After all, they lived in a country that had barely emerged from economic terms - from the Stone Age at the time of the first Anglo-Norman invasion: a country that spent the next six centuries in a state of continual civil war; a country whose farmers had not learned how to thresh corn and who had their horses draw ploughs by the tail; a country that never enjoyed an industrial revolution.

English caricatures of the Irish were based upon, although distortions of, the truth. The real issue is the extent to which the English were themselves responsible for creating the truth that led to the caricature, by keeping Ireland in a state of colonial dependency.

ANDREW BARR
London NW6

Sir: Your correspondent Dr A M Hulme (Letters, 19 March) might do well to inquire about the training of those who carry the responsibility of managing at the sharp end of the NHS.

He would find that many such managers have undertaken the portering, auxiliary nursing and domestic tasks to which he refers, as part of their training, as well as observing the work of doctors and other health care professionals. Conversely, it is sadly true that medical training in this country has not given the opportunity for doctors to gain an understanding at an early stage of the task of managing the diverse organisations that make up the NHS.

However, many in the medical profession do see the need to work closely with their local managers to ensure that the public resources available in the NHS are used to the best possible effect for the benefit of the patients whom we serve.

N J CHAPMAN
Chief Executive
West Dorset General
Hospitals NHS Trust
Dorchester, Dorset

Too late to pull out of Europe

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ANDREW BARR
London NW6

Creeping peril of land mines

Sir: Christopher Bellamy's report on Britain's increasing isolation in opposing a ban on land mines (19 March) highlights the Government's view that "anti-personnel mines have a role as defensive weapons provided their positions are accurately recorded". This view presupposes that mines will stay put once placed, which is not always the case.

Torrential rain in Mozambique this month has flooded a wide area including the heavily mined Manhiça district. Many of the 200,000 people affected have lost their homes and belongings. Once the waters subside, some may face the added danger of mines displaced by the floods from known minefields.

Only a total ban offers long-term hope of significantly reducing the daily toll of suffering anti-personnel mines inflict.

MARTIN COTTINGHAM
Christian Aid
London SE1

Managing NHS

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N J CHAPMAN
Chief Executive
West Dorset General
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Dorchester, Dorset

If the anorak fits

Sir: Leslie F Churchill (Letter, 21 March) should abandon his anorak at once.

An "anorak" is generally taken as a pedant with particularly boring hobbies - typically transport, folk music, replying to letters to the editor... Ahh. Bit of an own-goal, really. Oh well, I'm off to Millefs to get an extra-large anorak.

GARETH LODGE
St Albans,
Hertfordshire

The Cabinet and other cases of brain rot

The Government has finally come out and said it, then. Elections in Northern Ireland are safe.

"Yes," says chief whip, Doctor to the Government, "Doctor" Brian Mawhinney, "the latest scientific advice shows beyond all fairly reasonable doubt that elections in Northern Ireland can take place."

Without damaging anyone's health?

"You can never be totally sure of anything," says Doctor Brian "Mawhinney", "but insofar as you can be tolerably sure of anything, then yes, with luck, fingers crossed, touch wood, we can go ahead and have elections in Northern Ireland."

Scientists are not so sure about this, however. The think that BSE (short for the Bogsides/Storm Exercise) may actually cause brain damage.

The reasons for this are quite clear," says a scientist who does not want to be named, only paid in cash. "The election arrangements proposed by the Government are so complicated that it causes severe brain damage even trying to work them out."

"It has always been said that anyone who claims to understand the Irish situation does not, by definition, know what he is talking about, and I



MILES KINGSTON

think we can say that the same goes for these Northern Ireland election arrangements.

"An election on the mainland is straightforward by comparison. Several candidates stand for election and the one that gets the most votes goes to Parliament and does exactly what party leader tells him to. However, under these Northern Ireland arrangements..."

The scientist falls silent. "Yes?"

There is no answer. Under the strain of trying to figure out what the Government means, the scientist has actually suffered major brain atrophy, a condition that causes people to go silent when a certain subject is raised, and which scientists now think is actually caused by elections in Northern Ireland, or BSE (Bombing and Semtex Elimination).

This is not peculiar to elections in Northern Ireland, of course. Scientists have isolated other topics of conversation which are suspected of causing major brain rotting, of which the major ones are:

Europe
The Booker Prize
Tony Parsons
The total predictability of panellists' responses on Any Questions and Question Time
The Newbury bypass
Britpop
The Scott report
The Internet
The extreme difficulty of getting cellophane wrappers off the outside of brand new blank VHS tapes, etc.

It has been noticed that the introduction of any of these topics into the average conversation can lead within minutes to distressing symptoms such as staring into space, looking at watches, getting on coats, and leaving the house for periods up to several weeks without phoning home. But it is now believed that the introduction of BSE (jocularly supposed to stand for Bloody Silly Elections) might lead to displacement symptoms on a scale not known before.

"Yes, there is a link," says a politician who prefers to stand down at the next election. "There is definitely a link between the intractability of a subject and the mental health of the

person who is discussing it. Now, I have been in Parliament for 10 years, and my doctor has seriously warned me that if I don't get out now, I could become certifiable during the next Parliament. And I am sure he's right. Most of the Cabinet is stark staring bonkers already.

"Have you seen all these staring eyes? I mean, have you really looked hard at the Cabinet recently?"

"Which ones?"

"Well, I don't want to run the risk of libel, but if you look at the ones called Michael you'll get an idea of what I'm talking about."

Back to Doctor "Brian" Mawhinney for a last comment.

"I believe that the electoral arrangements in Northern Ireland will work because you can't trust a party where someone like Harriet Harman sends her child to a grammar school, and even if we get it wrong, I think you will find that the Scott report says we had the best of intentions."

"I am totally confident that the way forward has now been focused and targeted in such a way that we can formulate the appropriate responses. 'I am sorry. What was the question?'"

BSE is believed to stand for Bullshit Explanation.

Let's

Mad cows and British science

Poison bomb

WHAT FUTURE FOR BEEF?

Let's keep the Government out of it

Run the beef industry under the rules of commercial competition and taxpayers would be safer

Let's stand back for a moment from the fate of our 11 million cattle; from the sad fact that there may well be some people – one hopes very, very few – who have contracted Creutzfeldt-Jacob disease from eating beef products; and from the bizarre fact that between 1986 and 1989 people thought it a bright idea to feed our cattle with pellets made from the chopped-up brains of sheep. Let's focus instead on the unpalatable truth that if it does become necessary to slaughter the British herd, most of the loss will be carried by British taxpayers.

That is the way the agricultural industry works. We regard it as normal that our producers should be paid subsidised prices for food. We accept that meat here should cost twice as much as it does in, say, Australia or New Zealand. We think that the management of agriculture should be part of the remit of government, and so it is somehow the Government's fault that the industry should have got itself into this mess. We have dumped the idea that the government should involve itself in organising manufacturing industry, that it should run a telephone

service or own an oil company. But we seem to be stuck with involvement in agriculture.

Of course, we are not alone in this. All around the world governments are more closely involved in food than they are in any other industry. At one extreme they own collective farms and plantations, a policy that is now widely discredited. But even in countries where the market economy is established for everything else, they still get drawn into the marketing process and, as a result, into acting as an industry representative. A minister thinks it perfectly appropriate to proclaim that he is feeding his children hamburgers; you would never get him announcing that he was encouraging his family to drink more whisky.

There is, in fact, an illuminating parallel between beef and whisky. The two industries are roughly the same size. The value of farm output of beef last year was roughly £2.4bn; of whisky produced roughly £2.5bn. We spend as consumers much the

same amounts of money on the two products. Add in the costs of the meat-processing industry, mark-ups in restaurants and canteens, and the total amount spent on beef comes to about £4bn. Take the total sales of whisky, and we spend about £3bn. So the total home spend on beef is a bit larger than on whisky. But whisky is a much more important export product: last year we exported £2.2bn of whisky but only £520m of beef. So you could argue that from the point of view both of national interest and tax revenues, whisky ought to receive much more of the Government's span of attention.

There is one other crucial difference: booze is run under the rules of commercial competition; beef is not. Consider what might happen if the beef industry were.

We would, I suggest, see the same division into a mass-market product and an upmarket one. There would be general brands, with, say, Scottish beef or West Country beef promoted in the same vein as, say, Cutty



HAMISH MCRAE

Sark. They would be basically commodity products, but would be cleverly promoted and the quality would be more carefully monitored. Alongside these, there would be more specialised brands for people who were prepared to pay a premium to be assured of higher quality, the bovine equivalent of single malts.

I personally would make a pitch for the Belted Galloway (much prized by discerning German consumers) to be promoted in the same way as the Macallan.

This would have profound consequences for the entire industry. Consumers would be able to demand that animals would be slaugh-

tered in humane and decent conditions. Instead of writing letters protesting or calling for the government to change legislation, they would be able to make their preferences known by buying meat from appropriate producers. If people felt strongly about animals being driven around the country for long periods, some supermarket or wholesaler would quickly spot that it could garner a larger share of the market by promising never to treat creatures in this way. You can already see this trend beginning in free-range chickens and so-called "organic" meat.

The key change here would involve a shift in responsibility. In most conventional industries the producer is liable for the quality of the product. Producers operate in the knowledge that a slip in quality will damage the brand image; this is a powerful discipline. Commercial companies inevitably make enormous errors, but they are in general liable for the consequences of their actions, however much they resist.

When Perrier found that its water had been contaminated it was forced by market pressure to withdraw its entire supply. When Distillers, the principal whisky producer, strayed so disastrously into pharmaceuticals with Thalidomide, it was eventually forced to pay compensation. In neither case did the taxpayer pick up the tab for a commercial error.

Over the next generation agriculture around the world is going to become much more like any other industry. Food products will no longer be subsidised to anything like the extent they are at the moment. New Zealand has already abolished such subsidies and the efficiency of its farms has soared as a result. It is probably the lowest-cost beef producer in the world.

Import barriers will be reduced, so that the benefits of low costs will be shared among the world community. Quality will rise. If we have a comparative advantage as a beef producer, as we may well do given our climate, then we will be able to

exploit it further. But it done in a proper comm with the industry appreci it was not in its long-term: est to be seen to be under of the incumbent minister

A properly-run comm try would now tackle the of consumers head-on. W not that requires an extre sure like slaughtering th herd is not yet clear; whi mean is looking at every st production process where has been expressed – wha mals are fed, what horm used, how are they slaught asking whether present p best practices in world ter the product is right, the ind think about rebuilding, which will not be difficult like eating beef.

Fail to get the product cloud of suspicion will ren the long-term commercial: to very small risks. But the stupid and any industry th listen to them, falls to un how the world has chang

Mad cows and British science

Our chronic under-investment in basic scientific research will hamper the fight against BSE, writes Tom Wilkie

Mad cow disease now looks as if it may be the equivalent of Aids, but as an epidemic confined to one country. The two diseases were recognised within a few years of each other, in both cases the causative agent was unknown, and in both cases governments that should have known better went into a state of denial.

But there the similarities end. An international scientific effort was mounted to track down and identify the causative agent of Aids. Britain is the only country with mad cow disease, and consequently the international scientific community has not seen it as a pressing problem.

But the Government failed to recognise its weakness in the basic science needed to underpin any sort of reasoned response to the potential of the bovine disease to trigger its human analogue, Creutzfeldt-Jacob Disease (CJD). It set up the CJD surveillance unit, which has reported this week to devastating effect, but it is frankly unacceptable that we have had to wait for the human corpses before we could think it likely – for we still do not know – that eating beef may have been responsible.

The CJD surveillance unit conducts applied research, which supplies invaluable information but not understanding. Why are definitive tools not already available to tell us for certain if people have caught CJD from eating beef and whether



BSE Britain: we still do not have a way of determining whether any given sample of beef is safe to eat

Photograph: PA

any given sample of beef is safe to eat? For decades, Britain has maintained a research unit in Edinburgh looking at the related disease of scrapie in sheep. It is an open secret in the scientific community that for nearly a decade – the period before

researchers make the wrong choices in science all the time – as long as there were others who were exploring the right avenues. But basic science in Britain is now so stretched that, until recently, there was hardly anyone else. Dr John Collinge and his colleagues

when the charismatic head of the department, Professor Bob Williamson, departed to Australia. Consequently, much of what we do know about the basis for these diseases is due to research led by Professor Stan Prusiner, in California, where there is neither scrapie nor mad cow disease. That is a telling indictment of the UK.

The basic science required to allow us to understand what has happened is not something that can be turned on and off like a tap. It requires motivated and clever people who are actually surprisingly cheap – for scientists are not as greedy as City financiers. But even so they are too expensive for the Government – Britain is the only OECD country spending less as a proportion of national wealth on research and development now than in 1981.

One of the lessons of the war

against Aids is that scientists doing apparently unrelated research made crucial contributions. It follows that if a country is to maintain the capacity to deal with potential threats, such as Aids or mad cow disease, it needs to maintain a broad base of scientists cheerfully doing work that appears utterly irrelevant.

It is an old lesson, for at the outbreak of the First World War, Britain discovered that it was so deficient in basic chemistry and its application that the dyes for Army uniforms, the optical glass for gun sights and the ingredients for explosives came from its enemy – imperial Germany.

Now another "war" has come: the one against BSE. And once again under-investment has rendered British science incapable of contributing fully to the fight.

Why are definitive tools not available to tell us if people have caught CJD from eating beef?

the outbreak of mad cow disease – this, the Neuropathogenesis Unit, essentially marked time scientifically by failing to appreciate the relevance of modern molecular biology – gene splicing and genetic engineering – to the work it was doing.

In principle, this would not matter

at St Mary's Hospital Medical School have been doing sterling work on modern molecular biology and CJD. But St Mary's is not immune from the stresses and strains of basic science in Britain – as demonstrated when its group researching Alzheimer's disease emigrated to the US en masse and

Poison bomb in the brain Cost of careless optimism

The UK's only epidemic of BSE was officially blamed on the feeding to cows of an improperly treated offal meal that had become contaminated by the scrapie agent – found in sick sheep brains. Yet this same UK ingredient was exported in millions of tonnes to cattle in BSE-free countries all over the world. It was also manufactured in a similar way in the US without any BSE erupting there. Furthermore, 24,000 plus UK cattle born after the offal ban in 1988 have still gone down with the disease.

But there was something unique to UK dairy farming in the Eighties that may give the real reason for the BSE epidemic: the Government required dairy farmers to treat their cattle for warble fly with an excessive dosage of a systemic pesticide. It contains organo-phosphate – a chemical also found in military nerve gas used in Iraq. This mother of all chemicals also contained phthalimide – the basic unit of the infamous thalidomide.

This chemical had to be poured along the backs of cattle, whether infected with warble fly or not, and was designed to penetrate the skin, turning the whole internal environment of the cow into a poisonous medium. The whole purpose was to kill off the warble grub that could be found even

The chemical used was also found in military nerve gas used in Iraq

cases are caused by the presence of a misfolded version of a specific protein called prion protein, found inside the brain of all mammals. The protein can become corrupted due to a rare inherited genetic fault; this accounts for low background incidence rates of all these diseases (CJD, scrapie, BSE) that have run for light years. (Maff's chief vet in 1912 reports "Scrapie in Oxen!")

Mark Purdey

The author is an organic dairy farmer in Somerset and a BSE researcher.

BSE should now be considered a threat to public health

on in a fume cabinet, and the person dealing with them should probably wear a face mask. At that time, we were eating 250,000 livers from infected cattle.

Seac's original decisions were optimistic but reasonable. They have turned out to be wrong or ill-informed. The repeated tightening of the restrictions on beef manufacture has made the previous

restrictions clearly inadequate.

The Ministry of Agriculture has produced a huge increase in the amount of food grown in the UK. It has done this by bringing in good methods and spreading them throughout the agricultural world. Food is spread from one part of the UK to another. Good markets and low margins have led to excellent food in the UK that is relatively cheap. The problem is that if something goes wrong then a whole industry collapses and a whole country is put at risk.

BSE should now be considered a threat to public health and should be handled by the Department of Health. It should be made a notifiable disease.

Research should be generously funded. We should try to find if people are already incubating the disease. The members of Seac who were in their posts before November 1995 should be asked to resign.

They should have known that a more cautious approach should have been taken. Optimism, finger-crossing and inactivity is unacceptable for a disease such as this.

Stephen Dealler

The writer is consultant in medical microbiology at Burnley General Hospital.

No reason to sacrifice sirloin

Politicians are not lying about safety, says Phil Saunderson

Food scares affect everyone – and no food at the centre of a scare is likely to attract more publicity than one we have grown up with and which is one of our traditional staples. Bad enough was the possibility that undercooked eggs could give us food poisoning – how much more alarming is the idea that traditional British beef could give us an horrific, brain-wasting disease!

The knee-jerk reaction is obvious – a scurrying away from supermarket beef counters, a careful scanning of food labels to ensure not the tiniest smidgen of beef can taint tonight's dinner. As for reassurances from leading politicians, government ministers and scientists – well, we've heard that all before, haven't we?

But have we? What exactly have we been told? And, underneath the hype and hysteria, what exactly are the facts? Surely, I am not being economic with the truth to report: a new variety of CJD has been discovered that has led to the deaths of 10 people under the age of 42.

The exact agent that caused this disease has not been identified, but government scientists have said it could be linked to BSE that was present in cattle in the Eighties.

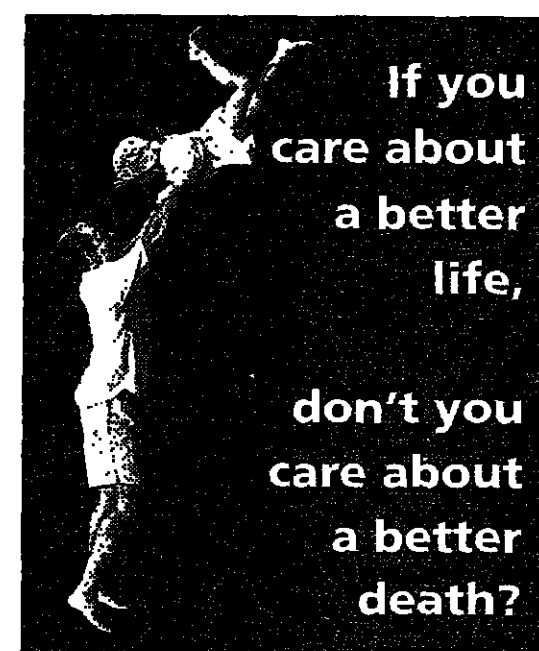
If beef is implicated in any way with the new disease, extremely unlikely it infected material got human food chain after when new regulations were in place.

British beef has been round with such a plethora of rules and regulations I probably one of the most fully controlled foodstuffs to find its way to British – or any other – plate.

If British beef is the cause disease, why are scientists and politicians to its defence? Why are they eating beef and why do they continue to tell us that their reason for any of us to eat it would be easy to "self interest" or "mone these scientists – the on the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee ticular – are those wi greatest knowledge of workings of BSE and C.

Are they people likely to put themselves at risk? After all, Thomas might almost have said what shall it profit a man gain the whole world an his own soul – but for a of roast sirloin?

The writer is chairman of the and Livestock Commission



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79% of people in this country believe that it should be legal for those incurably ill and in severe distress to be allowed to request a peaceful, dignified end to their suffering. Our law does not agree: so the agony continues.

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lituaries/gazette

Barry Appleby

and Gaye Gambol, comic-strip answer to the *Daily Express* on 11 March 1966. It was an incredible run for some years in special nine-picture rip in full colour. In a record run for any newspaper strip - and, there are still more

ply for George and Dots, they will not be seen, they will be missed. Barry and Dots Appleby married part-time whose lives the incidents that so charmed the Gambols were the

Appleby was born in 1925, but a family move to a school in Coventry, his love with drawing, and a competition for

un by the Royal Society, and became the first to win honours. For reasons the family moved to London, where

his art studies famous if forgotten. Albert Perry,

playing football for an away match at upon Thames, he saw

aggy schoolgirl on the touchline, roaring with laughter as he missed an easy goal. A day or so later he swerved his bicycle to miss a pedestrian, fell off and landed at the feet of the same schoolgirl. She hooted with laughter again, and a lifelong friendship was born.

He was 14, she was 13, and 12 years later they married. This was Dots, born Doris, who would one day share the strip's signature.

But first they became business partners. They set up a small office together as journalists. Barry following his father's footsteps. After an early sale to a boys' magazine with an article on how to tune a motor cycle engine, his luck ran out.

Dots, however, blossomed and was soon knocking out

thousand-word articles at 10 guineas a time, eight more than Barry's average. He abandoned writing in favour of his first love, art, and took a postal course from the famous Percy V. Bradshaw Press Art School.

This so encouraged him that he joined several real art colleges, studying life drawing at Heatherleys, anatomy at the Royal Academy, commercial art at St Martin's - and design at the Victoria and Albert Museum. With his savings running out, he tried his hand at cartooning, much recommended by Percy Bradshaw who was himself no mean hand at humorous art.

The first Barry Appleby cartoon signed with his new pen-name "App", appeared in no

less a periodical than *Punch*. As with so many new cartoonists, his following submissions all failed. He tried newspapers and in 1938 was taken on by the London evening paper the *Star*. This kept him busy with a joke cartoon a day until the Second World War broke out. An ambitious but under-funded newspaper designed for direct sale to servicemen was launched. Entitled *Reveille*, this would in later peaceful years turn into a light-hearted weekly, full of jokes and pin-ups.

During the war years Appleby became a full-time firm, while Mrs Appleby became an ambulance driver. Thus even two strips on half-time service became harder to complete in their deadline. This was the first time Dots took up

her husband's mapping-pen, dipped into his Indian ink and began helping out with the backgrounds. Her contributions, art work and inspiration would increase as their workload grew.

The origins of the Gambols can be seen in the early joke cartoons Barry Appleby contributed to the *Daily Express* from the day after VJ Day. Concealed as no more than a column-breaker to lighten the sports page, this daily joke became a regular punter for readers, especially as a regular punter began to appear, a chubby little everyman with a beaky nose and heavy eyebrows, now and then in the company of a slender curly-topped blonde.

One day, hearing that newsprint rationing was about to ease, and allow three "big paper" days a week, Barry and Dots started thinking seriously about a new, regular strip cartoon. The suburban punter and his wife would make ideal characters, but what to call them?

Dots came up with the perfect name for a couple who gambled for the fun of it. The Gambols made their back-page debut in March 1950, three times a week as a strip, three times as a single panel.

On 4 June 1951 paper rationing finally ended and the strip became a fully fledged daily. Then in 1956 the sheer popularity of the Gambols took them into the *Sunday Express* as well, their single strip boosted up to three rows to satisfy de-

mands from overseas Sunday papers with comic supplements. Finally colour was added and the *Gambols Annual*, first published in landscape format in 1952, added colour pages by 1991 when the 40th edition was published. Dots had died in 1985.

The strip itself, if seen only occasionally, seems somewhat reactionary today, dealing as it does with everyday domestic situations of an ageless, childless couple; the two kids who appear once or twice a year, Mugg and Flower, are a nephew and niece - a comic-strip pregnancy was considered editorially unsuitable. But that is evidently the strip's secret, for it is widely published in several languages around the world, and continues to prove that good art work is not necessary in a comic strip. It's the appeal of the ideas that counts.

In the Seventies Barry Appleby, a pleasant-looking, modest man, made a rare public appearance as a surprise guest on *Quick on the Draw*, the television game show for cartoonists. He made quite sure that his beloved Dots shared the spotlight, laughing heartily from the audience just as she had laughed at him in their faraway school days.

Denis Gifford

Barry Appleby, cartoonist, born Birmingham 30 August 1909; married 1935; died 11 March 1996.



Barry and Dots Appleby, left, and the first of their Gambols strip cartoons, published in the *Daily Express*, 16 March 1950. The Applebys met when he was 14 and she was 13

Thomas Enders

Enders was managing the investment bank of Brothers, after a distinguished and combative career in the diplomatic service in various places as Central America and the Caribbean, including Washington and Brussels. His preoccupation was economic and trade issues.

As he was, however, his single-mindedness enough more militantly anti-Communist elements in the Administration, and the bureaucratic pen-

falling between the of diplomacy and war, as for an abrasive

Enders was born in Hartford, Connecticut, family of wealthy Americans. On his mother's side, he was descended from the founders of the Con-

necticut, and on his father's side from early Dutch his great-grandfather under and president of na Insurance Company, and grandfather were

residents of the Hartford Bank, and his uncle, Enders, won the Nobel

Prize in Medicine in 1953.

Tom Enders compiled a brilliant record at Yale, where he was a member of one of the secret societies which are said to guarantee success in life. He graduated *summa cum laude* and first in his class in 1953. He later earned Masters degrees at the University of Paris and at Harvard.

In 1958 he joined the American foreign service and within 10 years he had become Deputy Assistant Secretary for Monetary Affairs. In 1971 he went to Cambodia at the time of the American bombing. He was three times the victim of assassination attempts, and on one occasion the car he had been riding in was totally destroyed.

Together with his ambassador, Emory C. Swank, he produced a long document, now deposited with the historical division of the Department of State, defending the B-52 carpet-bombing of that country against charges by the British journalist William Shawcross and others that it was indiscriminate and produced unnecessary casualties.

At the onset of the energy crisis, Enders was brought back to Washington to serve as Assistant Secretary of State for

Economic and Business Affairs. In that job, between 1974 and 1976, he was one of the founders of the International Atomic Energy Authority. He then went as ambassador to Canada, where one of his achievements was the overcoming of the opposition to a new pipeline to take natural gas from Canada to the United States. From 1979 to 1981 he was US ambassador in Brussels.

Enders served as Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs from 1981 to 1983. He opposed the limited support the Reagan Administration gave to Britain in the Falklands conflict, taking the view that the damage to American interests in Latin America was more important than any damage to British interests.

He played a leading role in the Reagan Administration's "two-track" policy in Central America. This advocated working for negotiated settlements of conflicts in the region while at the same time supporting anti-Communist forces, including the right-wing "Contra" rebels in Nicaragua. He was one of the architects of the San José Principles, which led to the "Contadora" peace process

which eventually restored peace to Central America.

He also supported increased arms shipments to US allies, including the Contras. He was convinced that Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala and even Surinam were the targets of a concerted, "falling dominoes" style Soviet and Cuban campaign to overthrow democracy.

In the end Enders' independent operating style lost the confidence of the State Department. At the same time his insistence that there should be diplomatic as well as covert military activity in Central America made him a target for those even more gung-ho Cold Warriors in the White House national security staff and elsewhere like Oliver North and Elliott Abrams who wanted to rely mainly on secret paramilitary activity. People put it about that Enders was "going soft" on El Salvador.

In 1983 Enders, who, one of his colleagues said, had "reaped the whirlwind" for having excluded so many people from his intrigues, was forced out and sent to Madrid as US ambassador. In 1986 he retired from the foreign service with the rank of career Minister.

Enders was six foot six or eight, according to various accounts. His manner was both aggressive and superior. Even to an admirer such as his boss George Shultz he was "imperial, intellectual and ironic". His analysis, Shultz commented, "conveyed an aura of brilliance even when he stated the obvious. People were impressed by his talents, but his sometimes smug smile and style could irritate even those who admired him most."

While in Madrid, Enders wrote a book, *Latin America: the crisis of debt and growth*. When he retired from the foreign service and joined Salomon Brothers, he recognised the growth potential of emerging markets in Latin America and played an important part in bringing borrowers in Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Mexico back to the New York market.

Enders' hobbies were walking and mountaineering. He climbed in the Canadian Rockies and the Alps, and explored pilgrimage roads in France and Spain. He was also interested in botany and generous in his support for botanical gardens, including Kew.

Godfrey Hodgson

Thomas Ostrom Enders, diplomat and banker, born Hartford, Connecticut 28 November 1921; Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for International Monetary Affairs 1968-69; Deputy Chief of Mission, Belgrade 1969-71; Phoenix 1971-74; Assistant Secretary of State for Economic and Business Affairs 1974-75; US Ambassador to Canada 1975-79; to EEC 1979-81; to Spain 1981-83; Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs 1981-83; managing director, International Corporate Finance Department, Salomon Bros 1986-96; married 1955 Gaetana Marchegiano (one son, three daughters); died New York 17 March 1996.

Abd al-Wahhab Muhammad

Abd al-Wahhab Muhammad was one of a number of Egyptian poets who started their careers as colloquial poets and writers on the heels of the 1960s, which brought Egyptian poetry to the attention of literary

circles. His output of 11,000 songs at the time of his death. They can be seen in the extensive record of the 1960s, the songs were written in one of the several dialects or vernaculars of the Arab world or was part of the various oral performances, although they often attained a much larger audience than their literary-language counterparts.

After centuries of overlooking and marginalising oral literature and colloquial modes of expression the literary scene started to grant them prominence and respectability from the 1960s onwards. This was partly due to a recognition of the importance of cultural studies which put many creative

forms, such as songs, television soaps and films, on a par with respectable literary genres. In the field of colloquial poetry and song-writing, the change was also due to the seminal work of the late Salah Jaheen. When Jaheen's poetry was sung by the most prominent contemporary Egyptian singers (such as the great Umm Kalthoom, the Edith Piaf of the Orient, and Abd al-Halim Hafiz), it took the audience by storm and gained

for song-writing the talent of a group of young poets who radically changed the nature of the Arab song.

Abd al-Wahhab Muhammad was born in 1930 in the popular quarter of Jammaliyya in old Cairo. His father was a teacher in the Azhar, the main religious educational institution in Egypt. Muhammad started his education in a traditional manner by learning the Koran and then went to primary and secondary schools. He did not complete his education and instead went on to work as a clerk in Misr Oil Company in Cairo. While working there, he started to write colloquial poems and offered some of them to the eminent singer Fayza Ahmad, who gave the first performance of one of Muhammad's songs in 1953. With the help of Jaheen, Muhammad moved to work for the influential weekly paper *Ras al-Yasuf* and founded his contacts with lyrical poets and song-writers.

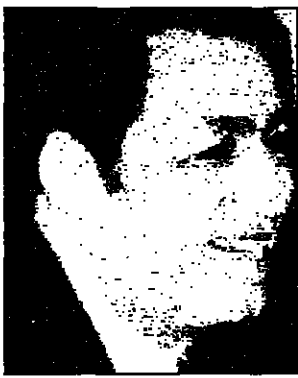
The great break in his career came when Umm Kalthoom, at the peak of her career as the

most influential singer in the Arab world sang Muhammad's song "Hubb Ayh?" ("What Kind of Love?") in 1960. The song was set to music by the talented young musician Ballegh Hamdy and attained instant acclaim throughout the Arab world. It heralded a new sensibility and a different type of love song, in which songs of sentimentalism were replaced by a genuine desire to explore the meaning of love, question its hackneyed clichés, and propose a new type of love based on reciprocal understanding, gender equality and rational commitment. The prevalence of the interrogative mode of expression throughout the song reflects a tendency to question received wisdom and challenge established norms, which was part of the new ethos of the 1960s. Umm Kalthoom went on to sing eight more of Muhammad's songs, including her very last song, "Hakam alayna al-Hawa" ("The Dictates of Love").

Muhammad's songs were sung by such prominent Arab singers as A. Hafiz, Shadiyah, A. Radi and M. Foad, in Egypt, and the Syrian R. Ahmad, the Algerian Wardah, the Tunisian Latifah and the Moroccan Samira Said. He collaborated with M. Abd al-Wahhab, R. Samir, S. Makawi, B. Hamdy, K. al-Husseini, M. al-Muallim, A. Shurail. Because song is a constant dialogue between words and music, Muhammad's sensitive words influenced the compositional skills of these often very different musicians and contributed to the development of their music. His success did not entice him to confine his work to successful musicians or popular singers, and he continued to work with the new singers and musicians of the 1980s and 1990s.

Salwa Hafez

Abd al-Wahhab Muhammad, poet and song-writer, born Jammaliyya, Cairo 1930; married (one son, one daughter); died Muhammadiseen, Cairo 15 January 1996.



Muhammad: love songs

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At the beginning of his luminous career, Odysseus Elytis said: "I write so that black does not have the last word." In his last book, *West of Sorrow*, where words seem to pursue one another, breathless, he writes: "But never, beauty, was time lent to me / to succeed against aniline black a victory..."

Obscure words of a poetic kernel which was about to explode with infinite possibilities, writes Katherine Angelaki-Rooke (further to the obituary by Professor Roderick Beaton, 19 March).

Black and light, sunshine and darkness, these were the two poles of Elytis' poetry, a pendulum between passion and patience, a bewilderment stretching throughout the day.

At the beginning, he was acclaimed as the poet of the sparkling Aegean, of *The Sovereign Sun*, of *The Body of Summer*. In his poems, especially *The Mad Pomegranate Tree*, with all the answers to the difficult questions hanging from its branches ("Tell me, that which opens its wings on the breast of things / On the breast of our deepest dreams, is that the mad pomegranate tree?"), the sun occupied the land of Greece, as if death had never stepped on her territories, only resurrection.

But, while the poet had written in the past, "The sorrow of death has set me in such a fire, that my glow returned to the sun", it is with *The Light Tree* (1971), when he had just turned 60, that Elytis feels death starting to cast its real shadow. "The first time it crossed my mind to find an end in the midst of happiness. Death attracted me like a strong gaze where you can see nothing else."

Steadily, through collections like *The Invisible April*, *The Open Elysian* and finally *West of Sorrow*, the blend of darkness and light becomes just a pure black stone, an onyx. "A key

turns both ways: either you lock yourself in or you open yourself to all."

The "poet of the Aegean" and of "the Greek sun" at this point, in my mind, becomes a really great poet. Because all great poets, or should I say those who belong to that "species" with more or less access to perfection, they all say the same thing, examine the same impossibility: how to live with all this darkness surrounding us, waiting for us, waiting upon us? And now, in spite of this, knowing only this, one can live a deep human life?

"Life is a chord / where a third sound interferes / and it is the one which tells the truth about what the poor man throws away (and what the rich man collects) (West of Sorrow). Again, "The sky (will be) the way children want it / with roosters, pine cones, azure kites / flags / On Saint Heracles' day / the kingdom of the child" writes Elytis. So too Jan Kochanowski, the 16th-century Polish poet, asks for Heracles' tears to help him to mourn his "small girl, his little daughter". They both see Heracles related to a child's world.

They all say the same thing, but we, down here, we are not invited to the great conference of the immortals and we don't know it.

May I add to Roderick Beaton's excellent and moving obituary of the great poet Odysseus Elytis? writes Ian Martin.

Soon after the richly deserved award of the Nobel Literature Prize, Elytis was invited to London to receive an honorary degree. Although widely read in English he was not at all fluent in it, and I was among those asked to come forward and converse with our distinguished guest in his own language. What does one say to an outstanding poet, who is also a genuinely modest man? The last thing he wanted to talk about was his own poetic achievement.

The answer lay in a subject very dear to his heart: the state of higher education in Greece. A new university was being set up in the island of Crete (the poet's birthplace): I remember vividly how excited and eloquent this naturally shy and reticent man became on the subject. The University of Crete is now well established and flourishing: it is singularly appropriate for it to be associated with the memory of one of the century's very finest poets.

Elytis: "A key turns both ways"

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The answer lay in a subject very dear to his heart: the state of higher education in Greece. A new university was being set up in the island of Crete (the poet's birthplace): I remember vividly how excited and eloquent this naturally shy and reticent man became on the subject. The University of Crete is now well established and flourishing: it is singularly appropriate for it to be associated with the memory of one of the century's very finest poets.

Elytis: "A key turns both ways"

At the beginning of his luminous career, Odysseus Elytis said: "I write so that black does not have the last word." In his last book, *West of Sorrow*, where words seem to pursue one another, breathless, he writes: "But never, beauty, was time lent to me / to succeed against aniline black a victory..."

Obscure words of a poetic kernel which was about to explode with infinite possibilities, writes Katherine Angelaki-Rooke (further to the obituary by Professor Roderick Beaton, 19 March).

Black and light, sunshine and darkness, these were the two poles of Elytis' poetry, a pendulum between passion and patience, a bewilderment stretching throughout the day.

At the beginning, he was acclaimed as the poet of the sparkling Aegean, of *The Sovereign Sun*, of *The Body of Summer*. In his poems, especially *The Mad Pomegranate Tree*, with all the answers to the difficult questions hanging from its branches ("Tell me, that which opens its wings on the breast of things / On the breast of our deepest dreams, is that the mad pomegranate tree?"), the sun occupied the land of Greece, as if death had never stepped on her territories, only resurrection.

But, while the poet had written in the past, "The sorrow of death has set me in such a fire, that my glow returned to the sun", it is with *The Light Tree* (1971), when he had just turned 60, that Elytis feels death starting to cast its real shadow. "The first time it crossed my mind to find an end in the midst of happiness. Death attracted me like a strong gaze where you can see nothing else."

Steadily, through collections like *The Invisible April*, *The Open Elysian* and finally *West of Sorrow*, the blend of darkness and light becomes just a pure black stone, an onyx. "A key

turns both ways: either you lock yourself in or you open yourself to all."

The "poet of the Aegean" and of "the Greek sun" at this point, in my mind, becomes a really great poet. Because all great poets, or should I say those who belong to that "species" with more or less access to perfection, they all say the same thing, examine the same impossibility: how to live with all this darkness surrounding us, waiting for us, waiting upon us? And now, in spite of this, knowing only this, one can live a deep human life?

"Life is a chord / where a third sound interferes / and it is the one which tells the truth about what the poor man throws away (and what the rich man collects) (West of Sorrow). Again, "The sky (will be) the way children want it / with roosters, pine cones, azure kites / flags / On Saint Heracles' day / the kingdom of the child" writes Elytis. So too Jan Kochanowski, the 16th-century Polish poet, asks for Heracles' tears to help him to mourn his "small girl, his little daughter". They both see Heracles related to a child's world.

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COMMENT

Essentially the company is retreating back to its core utility business. Dull and boring though that strategy might be, it's obviously the way forward'

Thames' pot of gold turns out to be junk

When Thames Water was privatised in the late 1980s, Roy Watts, then chairman, dreamt of a diversified international water services group encompassing everything from contracting through to waste management. He wanted to take Thames to all four corners of the world. The boring old lowly paid civil servants who used to run our water utilities (reasonably effectively in most cases) were to go to get-rich, highly paid, option-incentivised businessmen, expensive limousines, flights to exotic locations, and the pursuit of the deal. To help him create such a group, he recruited Mike Hoffman as chief executive. The aim was to have at least 20 per cent of revenue derived from sources other than the central, regulated water utility business within five years. So they set about using the utility's money to make acquisitions.

Strategically most of these appeared to make a good deal more sense than what others were doing. There were no hotels or holiday companies, for instance; nor has Thames ever been hard-pressed enough to try to merge with an electricity utility (two of the others have). Rather, Thames concentrated on businesses that were at least in some way related to water – mainly contracting and water treatment equipment.

Whenever there is a pot of gold for diversification, however, it usually ends badly and Thames is no exception. Five years after embarking on the search for other forms of revenue, Thames is now retrenching. The

years of acquisition-making, flying the world and big salaries have in truth resulted in no more than a great ragbag of junk. Many of these companies, including the German contracting business, have been abject failures. Collectively, they have added significant negative value to the group.

The cost of getting out is a whopping great £95m. Out too goes the chief architect of the strategy, Mr Hoffman, with his golden handshake still to negotiate. Did he jump or was he pushed? In the end, it was probably a mixture of both, for it was Mr Hoffman who headed up the review of operations that led to yesterday's write-offs. By the time it was complete, it was obvious not only that the City would require a scapegoat but that there was not much of a job left for him to do. Mr Hoffman was chief executive of the group but the money-earning utility business has always been managed by others.

Thames is to keep six of the big international projects it is involved in, all of them in water delivery and treatment of some sort. But essentially the company is retreating back to its core utility business. Dull and boring though that strategy might be, it's obviously the way forward. Mr Hoffman's departure comes hard on the heels of the top management clear-out at Yorkshire Water. The circumstances are very different, of course, but there is a theme here. Lax regulation in the early years of privatisation tends to mean that even managements of

questionable quality can prosper, their faults and mistakes hidden by a cascade of monopoly profit. As public expectations rise, and the regulatory screw tightens, only the best management teams are going to flourish. The shakeout in utility management has a lot further to run.

Why has Severn Trent picked on South West?

In balance-sheet terms, a Severn Trent takeover of South West Water looks a perfectly respectable deal, and beats the rival proposal from Wessex Water hands down. It is when you look at either aspects of the deal that it seems not quite right. First, the arithmetic, which is hard to fault. Both potential bidders can afford to pay cash. But Severn Trent has low borrowings and at a capitalisation of £2.3bn is nearly three times the size of both Wessex and South West.

The gearing of a Severn-South West combination would rise to no more than 70 per cent, interest cover would not fall to less than 4.5 and at £7 a share such a deal would raise earnings by 15-20 per cent, according to Smith New Court. No contest then. In terms of financial engineering it makes eminent sense for the biggest water company to swallow the smallest, rather than have two tiddlers merge. Niggling doubts remain, however. Why has Severn Trent settled on a bid for the only

water company currently under offer when there so many other fish left in the pond? This pitches it into a contested bid that – despite promises not to overpay – could make South West Water an expensive proposition. Furthermore, Wessex has a better fit with South West that could justify it forcing the price up. The two have a common border and could probably make more operational savings than a company based in Coventry. Much of the argument Lynne des Eaux used for buying Northumbrian Water was based on the fact that it already owned the water company next door.

The best explanation for Severn Trent's choice is caution. South West Water is small enough to be easily digestible at £750m. On that basis it would make just as much sense to bid for Wessex, which is the same size. The other explanation is that Severn figures a bid for a non-contiguous company stands a better chance with the regulator, who is suspicious that mergers between adjacent companies will consolidate big regional monopolies. If this line of reasoning is correct, it could tip the balance of the bid.

Inflation is not dead yet

Inflation is dead, according to one of the City's most prominent economic commentators, Roger Bootle of HSBC Markets. The trouble

with epitaphs like this is that they often have a nasty habit of signalling a new burst of life. It is indeed a generation since Britain enjoyed such a good inflation performance, as the Prime Minister was swift to point out again in the House of Commons yesterday in response to the excellent inflation figures announced earlier. Mr Major and his Chancellor deserve congratulations. The question is whether the good performance will last for another generation.

The debate is between those who think there has been a profound structural change in the economy and those who believe the bad old British tendencies have merely been tempered by recent trends. Mr Bootle's case is that global competition, technology and labour market deregulation have made the inflation process irrevocably different. In the opposite camp are those who think wage pressures and margin building are not as bad as they were but have not been obliterated.

In the pessimists' favour is the fact that every other economy is also enjoying the lowest inflation for a generation. And Britain's headline rate – which fell to 2.7 per cent in February – remains above inflation on a comparable basis in 11 out of our 14 EU partners and five of the six G7 countries.

Nobody is suggesting that economic policy in Britain is so irresponsible that we will see inflation returning to 25 per cent. But the gloomier forecasts suggesting 5 per cent within a few years are entirely possible.

Stock Exchange gives go-ahead to trading reforms

JOHN EISENHAMMER
Financial Editor

The Stock Exchange emerged yesterday from months of bitter controversy to give the green light to a potentially radical reform of the way shares are traded in London. A fully automated order-matching system for the FT-SE 100 stocks is to replace the tradition of market makers quoting buy and sell orders, bringing the City into line with all international financial centres.

But the compromise blessed by the Stock Exchange's board bore the marks of the lengthy struggle by the powerful market makers and some of Britain's biggest institutional investors against the rushed change initially sought by the Exchange executive.

The board said it now expects spring 1997 to be the earliest date for the introduction of the new trading services. By limiting the future order book to the FT-SE 100, and most likely to restricting the size of potential orders, the compromise reform will also allow the big market makers to carry on their dominant business in London pretty much as before.

A statement by the board said the order book "will be combined with block trading, maintaining the ability of large players in the London market



Men who make markets: Giles Vardey, (left) and Michael Marks

to continue to take risks and commit capital."

The row over the nature and pace of the trading reforms was one of the main reasons behind the dramatic sacking at the beginning of this year of Michael Lawrence, the chief executive of the Stock Exchange. He subsequently accused a small group of market makers on the board, principally Donald Brydon of BZW and Michael Marks of Merrill Lynch (formerly Smith New Court) of mounting a coup against him to head off reforms they feared would damage their livelihoods. Mr Brydon and Mr Marks have denied the accusations.

The recommendation for a public limit order book accepted yesterday was put forward unanimously by a special Stock

Exchange steering committee comprising a majority of market makers. "There has been something of a change of heart," said one. "There has been a recognition that we have got to make this system work." Giles Vardey, director of market development at the Exchange said: "It was a good meeting, there is a good consensus."

But the recent consultation on the proposed reforms by the Exchange showed an overwhelming desire for more time, and considerable concerns among big institutions about preserving liquidity.

"We are talking about a vast number of issues, IT, regulation, rules. We are all in favour, but what practitioners are saying is that this is highly complicated and we need more time to finalise the proposal," said a board member.

Putting off the introduction until the spring at the earliest met strong pleas from IT departments that they want to get the adaptation to the Crest electronic settlement system out of the way before starting on another large innovation. The final stage of the Exchange's modernisation of its trading platform, Sequence Six, will go ahead as planned on 27 August, but its new trading service capability will not be activated until much later.

Bad day for jobs: Redundancies hit privatised railway, plane-maker and cut-price shops

South West Trains to sack hundreds

CHRISTIAN WOLMAR
Transport Correspondent

A sweeping redundancy programme is expected to be announced within days by South West Trains, the first privatised rail company, now operated by Stagecoach, Britain's largest bus company.

Union officials and management are due to meet today to discuss the redundancy plan, which is expected to be carried out over the next few weeks. Several hundred of the 4,000 staff are likely to be made redundant and unions fear that they will be offered terms less generous than those available under the old BR agreement,

which are more than double the statutory minimum.

South West Trains admitted last month, shortly after the takeover by Stagecoach, that 125 white collar staff were being made redundant, including a quarter of senior managers, in a first round of cuts. It warned then that further reductions in the workforce were inevitable.

South West Trains is under pressure to make sharp cuts in expenditure because the franchise was won by Stagecoach with a very low bid.

In BR's last year of management, the line received a subsidy of £63.5m, but Stagecoach is due to receive only

£54.7m in the forthcoming financial year.

Yesterday, Peter Field, managing director of South West Trains, warned on BBC Radio 4's *Today* that a restructuring of the company was planned and said: "Several hundred jobs will go at the end of the day."

Job losses are likely to be targeted most severely at the 400 headquarters staff as layers of management are removed, a standard Stagecoach approach when taking over companies. They are also expected to hit the 2,000 staff employed to look after stations, sell tickets and see off trains.

The company is likely to avoid trying to reduce the number

of drivers because of their industrial muscle.

Mr Field promised that no station would be defaced by these latest cuts and that there would be no reduction in the ticket office opening hours.

However, the cuts were seized upon by Labour as showing that privatisation will lead to massive job losses.

Clare Short, Labour's shadow transport secretary, said: "There is no reason to suspect that these type of job cuts will not be repeated by the other operators. There will be an adverse effect on services, with fewer staff at stations and greater pressure on the health and safety of both staff and the public."



Warning: Clare Short said job cuts would be repeated

Fokker blow to Shorts workers

RUSSELL HOTTEN

Shorts, the Belfast aerospace company, confirmed yesterday that 1,000 jobs would be lost because of the collapse of Fokker, but believed it could limit compulsory cuts to around 300.

Shorts has asked the UK government if it could switch 300 production workers to training programmes in preparation for contracts the company expects to become available later this year.

The company, which makes wings for the Dutch aircraft group, said about 540 temporary employment contracts would be ended over the next three months, and about 250 voluntary losses were likely.

Shorts closed production of

Fokker 100/70 wings last Friday after the Dutch government failed to find a buyer for the company, majority-owned by Germany's Daimler-Benz.

Ken Brundle, vice-president of Shorts, said yesterday that his company was pursuing potential new business opportunities in the civil and military sectors.

These included bids for government defence programmes such as the Replacement Maritime Patrol Aircraft, in which Shorts is teamed with British Aerospace. It is also involved in a missiles tender with Texas Instruments.

Decisions on these programmes are expected later this year. Success on these important programmes, whilst they would not create an im-

mediate replacement of production work, would create significant job opportunities in Shorts in the next four years," Mr Brundle said.

"We are reasonably optimistic. We had the opportunity to decide who we would partner on these tenders. We selected BAe and Texas Instruments because we thought they were the best products and we thought they had the best opportunities for success."

Shorts, owned by Canada's Bombardier, had become a sombre place, he told the Reuters news agency. "There is a sense of loss and a sense of sadness. The Fokker assembly line has been right at the heart of our main factory operations for the best part of 30 years."

Discount retailer may axe 300 staff in 27 stores

Some 300 jobs are in jeopardy following the collapse of the discount retailer Everything's a £2, writes Roger Trapp.

Scott Barnes and Andrew Conquest of accountants Grant Thornton, who were appointed receivers yesterday, are hopeful of finding buyers for some of the 27 stores either individually or in small groups.

The chain based on the US "dollar store" concept was founded in 1992 by Bruce Coe and George Lesak, with the first store specialising in gifts, food and cleaning products opening at Newcastle's Gateshead shopping centre. Since then, the Peterborough-based group has spread all over Britain, includ-

ing the South-east, where there are four to five outlets. Annual turnover reached about £12m, but losses since the start-up are approaching £2m. Many of the approximately 300 workers are part-time shop assistants.

Mr Barnes, head of corporate recovery at Grant Thornton, said the firm was already talking to "a number of parties interested in either small chains of stores or in individual stores". It was optimistic that some outlets could be sold.

He and Mr Conquest have appointed Mark Williams, a director of property agents DTZ Debenham Thorpe, to assess and market the portfolio of stores.

Weekend breaks with THE INDEPENDENT

2 nights for the price of 1

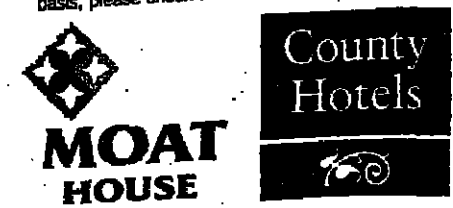
We would like to invite you to take a weekend break and stay two nights for the price of one. In conjunction with Queens Moat Houses Hotels, our offer allows you to pay for one night's bed and breakfast and get the next night, including breakfast, free. Rates are based on two adults sharing a twin or double room and the only stipulation is that your weekend break must include a Saturday.

You can choose from 82 hotels located throughout the UK, ranging from country houses and cosy inns, to modern hotels in the heart of city centres. All are three or four star properties and many will allow you to enjoy a longer stay on the same basis, pay for two nights and stay for four, for example. You can check this when making your booking.

To add to our offer, children under sixteen can stay free when sharing a room with two adults, plus children under six can breakfast free. For those of you who are feeling energetic, many of the hotels offer a Body Club or Club Motivation Health and Fitness Centre which you are free to use.

Pictured here is Briggens House Hotel in Ware, Hertfordshire. Previously the home of Lord Aldenham, the 17th century hotel stands in 80 acres of parkland. The hotel has its own professional, nine-hole golf course. The Briggens restaurant offers unique and creative dishes for which it is renowned. A double room for two people for two nights costs just £90.

Apart from the Royal Crescent Hotel, Bath and Blisley Manor near Stratford which are only available for stays Sunday-Thursday, some hotels may be able to offer mid-week breaks on the same basis, please check when booking.



BRIGGENS HOUSE HOTEL, WARE, HERTFORDSHIRE

TERMS AND CONDITIONS

- The offer is valid until 5 May 1996. Some hotels will extend the offer until 26 May 1996, please check when making your booking.
- This offer is only valid based upon two people sharing a twin/double bedroom for a minimum of two consecutive nights accommodation including full national breakfast.
- All reservations are subject to availability and allocation of suitable bedrooms being available.
- Children under six years of age when sharing a room with two adults will stay and eat free for bed and national breakfast only.
- Children aged six to fifteen years when sharing a room with two adults will stay free and be charged £4 for national breakfast per child per day.
- Children accommodated in their own room will be charged the same independent rate as adults. No further discounts are applicable.
- Full payment, including extras, is to be settled prior to departure from your selected hotel.
- The offer is only valid when you book through QUEENS-LINE UK Reservations, 0645 113311, quoting "Independent Offer" at the time of booking. Lines are open 8 am - 6.30 pm weekdays, 9 am - 4.30 pm at weekends and Bank Holidays.
- Cancellations are to be notified to QUEENS-LINE UK Reservations as soon as possible and are accepted up to 4 pm on the proposed day of arrival.
- This offer cannot be used in conjunction with any other offer, or promotion and is not valid for special events, theatre breaks, half-board arrangements, luxury weekends or wellness programmes.
- Offers only apply if the hotel is managed by a company in the Queens Moat Houses Group at the time a reservation is made.
- Photocopies of tokens and the vouchers are unacceptable.
- The weekend break prizes are each worth up to a maximum of £394 and must be taken before 31 August 1996, subject to availability.

HOW TO QUALIFY

To qualify for your 2 for 1 weekend break, you must collect four differently numbered tokens from the seven we are printing until Saturday 23 March. You will need to attach them to the voucher which we printed in Wednesday's Independent. In case you missed it, we will print another voucher tomorrow, the final day of our offer, with our last token, Token 7.

HOW TO BOOK

For a Town & Country Classic Weekend Break brochure call 0641 543 500 quoting "Independent Offer". Once you have chosen your hotel call QUEENS-LINE UK Reservations on 0645 113311, quoting "Independent Offer". Your confirmation will then be sent out within 48 hours. Please remember to take your voucher and four differently numbered tokens to your hotel, they must be presented on arrival.

£7,000 OF WEEKEND BREAKS TO BE WON

Today is your last chance to win one of four weekend breaks. Each prize entitles two people to a two night bed and breakfast weekend break at the hotel of their choice. For a chance to win one of our prizes, simply call the following number: 0891 252 999.

You will be asked to answer one simple question and leave your name, address and telephone number. Calls cost 39p per minute cheap rate, 49p per minute at all other times. Four winners will be picked at random from all correct entrants after lines close at midnight tonight. Normal Newspaper Publishing plc rules apply. The Editor's decision is final.

Weekend breaks
TOKEN 6
THE INDEPENDENT

market report/shares

Blue chips modest, but second-liners show their strength

TAKING STOCK

DATA BANK

FT-SE 100

3698.3+12.9

FT-SE 250

4297.4+15.2

FT-SE 350

1860.5 +6.5

SEAQ VOLUME

842m shares,

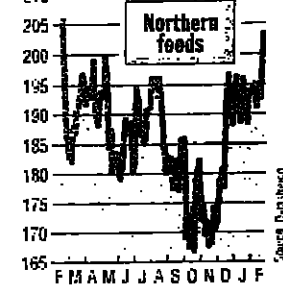
40,076 bargains

Gifts Index

92.66 +0.21

SHARE SPOTLIGHT

share prices, pence



Blue chips may be ducking and diving and going nowhere very fast but second-liners are displaying a clean set of heels.

As the 100 shares which make up the FT-SE blue chips index managed modest headway the next 250 shares - constituents of the second-line index - put on another robust display, hitting another peak of 4,297.4 points with a 15.2 gain.

This yawning gap between the two indices is seen as further evidence that, at least at present, the London market of two unrelated experiences.

The 100 blue chips are victims of interest rates and New York, while the 250 shares are viewed as offering a much more representative view of the UK economy, illustrating the revival in building and engineering shares as well as the new speculative strength of the utilities.

Second-liners for long lagged behind blue chips - but

they have more than made up for their reticence in the past few weeks, hitting six peaks this month while the blue chip index has, at best, drifted. And it was their turn to catch the eye once again yesterday.

Wassall, the conglomerate, gained 23p to 310p, reflecting figures: South West Water spurted 44p to 65p as Severn Trent jostled with Wessex Water to mount a bid.

Northern Foods, which has for long been in the doldrums, drew strength from its involvement in meats, other than beef, and bullish comments from Mees Pierson's John Marshall who is showing for an uninspiring £121m this year and looking for £134m next. The shares gained 10p to 204p.

The BSE sufferers were Sims Food, off 9p at 17p, and Whitchurch, headed by former Hard Rock Cafe chief Barry Cox, down 6p at 40p. Grand Metropolitan, the Burger King



MARKET REPORT

DEREK PAIN

Stock market reporter of the year

group, gained 5p to 434p. Electrophoretics, which is developing a system for quickly detecting BSE from blood samples, jumped 17p to 152p.

Guinness responded to flat figures with a 11.5p fall to 460.5p and, in a thin market, Young's Brewery enjoyed a rare ferment with the voting shares up 37p to 550p and the non-voters 35p higher at 503p. Guinness Peat, the financial group run by New Zealand entrepreneur Sir Ron Brierley, is stake building.

Austin Reed edged ahead another 2p to 234p on expectations of corporate action while Nurdin & Peacock - the cash and carry group where SHV,

the Dutch investment group is hovering - held at 150p.

Lucas Industries, soon to lose chief executive George Simpson to GEC, motored 7p to 209p, equal of its year's high. Since it became clear that Mr Simpson was off to meet fresh challenges the shares have drawn support on the view that Lucas is vulnerable to a take over strike. The shares were down to 172p in December.

Thames Water jumped 17p to 575p on its reorganisation and WH Smith, on renewed take over speculation, gained 13p to 437p.

Drug shares enjoyed a late run as SBC Warburg produced

a basket warrant on the sector. SmithKline Beecham gained 28p to 684p. Glaxo Wellcome, helped by upbeat data on a genital herpes treatment, ended 14p to the good at 819p.

Flare, the Ian Gowrie-Smith industrial vehicle announced the expected acquisitions and a cash call, ending the day 6p higher at 181p.

MAID, the information group, managed a 2p gain to 228p. Easyjet, an internet service provider where MAID has 15 per cent, has delayed its market debut until Wednesday. Palmer, a high tech commercial printer, moved from a 154p placing to close at 186p; Triad, a computer group floated at 135p reached 178p. Silver Shield, a windscreen group which attracted a 60 million turnover, moved 0.75p from its placing price to 3.75p.

VossNet, a computer group traded on AIM, surged 153p to 413p as a possible US take

over materialised. Its main shareholder, with 52.97 per cent of the capital, has conditionally accepted an offer of 130p cash and 350p in redeemable shares in the bidder, a company called Petra.

Stanford Rook, the TB treatment group, surged 70p to a 580p peak on an encouraging statement. Lloyds Chemists was firm at 472p; The European Commission is expected to decide today whether to investigate the bids from Gehe of Germany and Unichem or pass the issue back to the UK.

Rodime, which is little more than a litigation play, more than doubled to 4.25p. This once-proud pioneer of computer disk technology has undertaken a restructuring to allow it to continue pursuing its claim against Seagate, another pioneer which has grown into one of the world's leading disk drive makers.

Bruntcliffe Aggregates, shaded to 27p on profits, hit by litigation charges, of £1.4m against £1.6m. Around £2.2m seems likely this year. Anthony Hanson and Paul Kaye (former directors) and friends have 27 per cent plus loan stock convertible into 3.5 per cent. Their intentions are unclear.

Qimid States, a US car parts distributor where profits are under pressure, held at 40p. Boston International has built a 14.3 per cent stake, behind which stands the Irish entrepreneur Dermot Desmond, who acquired London City Airport for a knockdown £14.5m last year.

Phoenix Timber, a property preservation group, has enjoyed a romp since it announced a £2.2m cash call. The shares, 18p at the time, gained 3p to 29p.

Share Price Data

Prices are in sterling except where stated. The yield at last year's dividend, grossed up by 20 per cent, as a percentage of the share price. The price/earnings (P/E) ratio is the share price divided by last year's earnings per share, excluding exceptional items. Other share prices are in US dollars except where stated. Ex rights & dividends on Ex all United Securities Market a suspended pp Party Field pm Nil Paid Shares. Source: Financial.

The Independent Index

The index allows you to access real-time share prices by phone from Scot. Simply dial 0801 223 335, followed by the 4-digit code printed next to each share. To access the latest financial reports dial 0801 223 335 followed by one of the two-digit codes below.

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Market leaders: Top 20 volumes

Stock	Volume	Stock	Volume	Stock	Volume	Stock	Volume
BT	200000	Roll Royce	20000	Spain Steel	70000	National Power	60000
Lyons TSB	20000	ASDA Group	10000	Lucas	70000	Cadbury Ship	60000
Glaxo Well	20000	Volvo	10000	CS	60000	Saint Berthens	50000
Glaxo Well	20000	Glaxo Well	10000	Glaxo Well	60000	Glaxo Well	50000
Glaxo Well	20000	Glaxo Well	10000	Glaxo Well	60000	Glaxo Well	50000

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An end to 'boom and bust' is the vital business ingredient

INDUSTRY VIEW

PETER RODGERS

Sitting a few years ago as a fly on the wall in the office of a small firm struggling for survival, the cause of the danger to the company and its staff was plain to see.

Forget government red tape, late payment by suppliers and all the rest of the problems that John Major and Tony Blair have been chewing over in public for the last 10 days in their attempts to win the small business vote. What was really driving the firm to the brink was horribly simple.

It had expanded to keep up with demand during the boom years and was now being crucified in an unexpected severe recession, which had its customers diving for cover and cancelling their orders.

The result was cutbacks, redundancies and a soaring debt to the bank, which agreed to continue the overdraft only after an enormous squabble over the assets which the bank held as security.

Tens of thousands of small firms went through this searing experience during and after the last recession, with losses exceeding start-up by nearly half a million between 1991 and 1993.

Some of the afflicted firms had seen much the same happen 10 years earlier. Unlike the most recent incident, which hit hardest in the service industries

and property, that first episode was devastating for small manufacturers, and a whole generation was wiped out.

The two recessions together did more damage to Britain's entrepreneurs than the myriad of financial and other obstacles to small business growth that have been identified in a succession of worthy tomes going back 66 years to the Macmillan report in 1930. (This discovered a shortage of finance for small firms known as the "equity gap," and led to the establishment after the war of the Industrial and Commercial Finance Corporation - now known as ICF).

The roller-coaster UK economy has almost certainly distorted the way small businesses behave, encouraged entrepreneurs into property rather than manufacturing and services and damaged investment and growth. It is no surprise, only three years after the last end of the last recession, that the impact is still clearly visible in the behaviour of entrepreneurs.

A survey published on Monday by BINDER Hamlyn of 3,000

small firms painted a particularly depressing picture. It emerged that the main constraint on expansion was not the raft of complaints about red tape and the rest, but the unwillingness of owner-managers to put up with the pain and hard work involved in rapid growth.

An Anglo-German survey of 3,500 firms which was released on Wednesday by the universities of Belfast and Strathclyde found that small firms in the UK had a significantly worse record for introducing new products than those in Germany and Ireland.

A related symptom is that entrepreneurs continue to worry rather more about how to get their wealth out of their companies than about reinvesting it, which is a perfectly rational response to uncertainty about the future.

Capital gains, inheritance tax and the low level of investment incentives are claimed to be a disincentive to the growth of small businesses, and both John Major and Tony Blair have promised to look at the tax regime in their attempts to curtail the small business lobby. But this is in reality a side issue now that the top marginal rates on inheritance

tax, income and capital gains are down to 40 per cent.

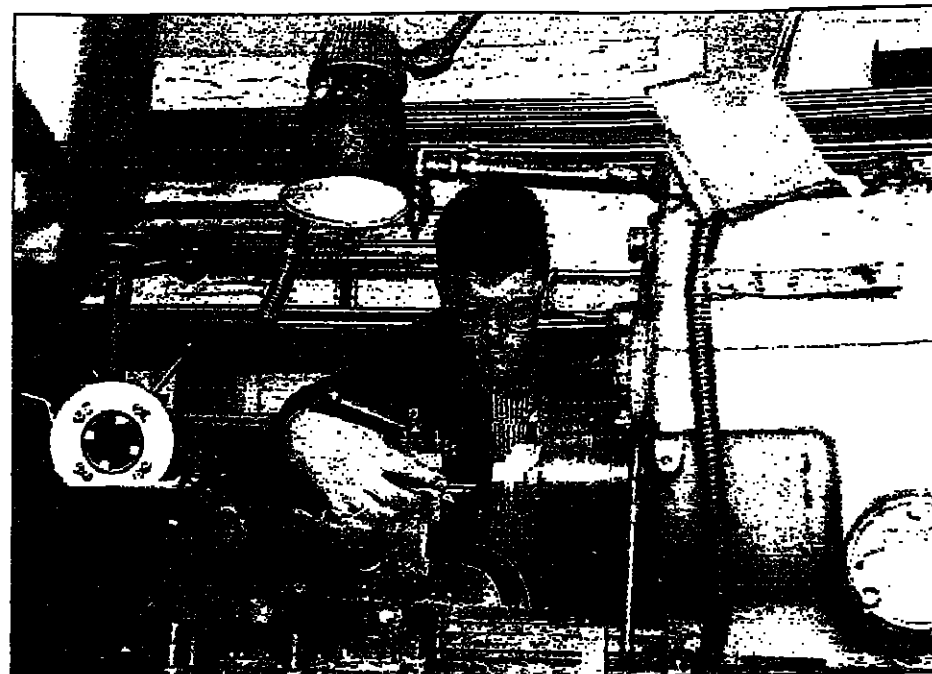
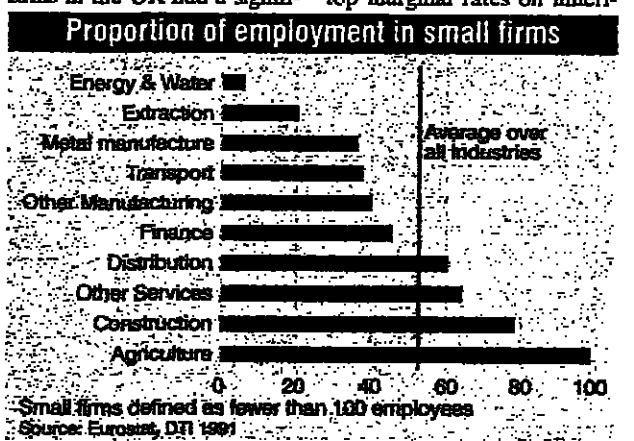
That said, there is still much that can be done to improve the services available to small firms from the Government, the banking and the venture capital industry. But there are no simple recipes, which is why the competition between John Major and Tony Blair to court the small firms vote has proven so sterile.

The most curious aspect of Mr Blair's policy for small business, announced in a speech in the City on Wednesday, is how much it overlaps with that developed by Michael Heseltine, when President of the Board of Trade, and continued by Ian Lang, his successor.

Each side has even taken to claiming the other is pinching its best ideas. It was Labour, for example, that first suggested a national network of Business Links to supply one-stop advice services to small firms.

Mr Blair could hardly have used his key policy speech on Wednesday to deliver anything other than a promise to improve the network once he gets into power. It will be a centrepiece of his small firms policy.

With so much consensus hidden behind the political mudslinging, it has become desperately hard for Labour to make a distinctive contribution to the debate.



The roller coaster: Many entrepreneurs have moved out of industry. Photograph: FT

Plans from the last manifesto for a state-owned small business bank have been dropped as impractical, and replaced with an offer of financial advice, offered through Business Links, and a pooled insurance scheme for venture capitalists.

Both sides say they will review the small firms loan guarantee scheme, cut red tape, improve insolvency procedures and use the Internet to offer advice on exports. When it comes to shopping lists like these, the small firms lobbies are pushing at an open door now that they have both the main parties chasing the votes of entrepreneurs.

How on earth, the policymakers must have asked themselves, can Tony get a headline

that would differentiate the Labour product from the Government's?

The answer must have come in a flash when John Major, in a speech 10 days ago, poured cold water on the idea of legislation for statutory interest payments on overdue debts. Mr Blair seized on this, underlined by the fact that all but one of the main business lobbying organisations now believe that statutory interest would cause more problems than it solves.

Late payment of debts is worth tackling, even if the best that can be achieved in practice is to embarras firms in complying with payment records, a proposal that both Mr Blair and Mr

Major happen to agree about. But as a way of transferring the lot of Britain's small firms, the late payment issue may prove as much a red herring as the attempt three years ago to blame all the problems of entrepreneurs on the banks.

Labour's most significant policy development for small firms has nothing to do with late payments, venture capital insurance, or reform of education and training.

The really important issue for small firms is whether Mr Blair can deliver Labour's new commitment to a stable economy, free of the boom and bust that plagued Lady Thatcher's reign and destroyed the businesses of so many of her natural supporters.

Foreign Exchange Rates

Country	Spot	1 month	3 months	6 months	1 year
US	1.578	1.578	1.578	1.578	1.578
Germany	2.084	2.084	2.084	2.084	2.084
France	2.269	2.269	2.269	2.269	2.269
Italy	2.385	2.385	2.385	2.385	2.385
Japan	163.76	163.76	163.76	163.76	163.76
ECU	1.2239	1.2239	1.2239	1.2239	1.2239
Belgium	48.619	48.619	48.619	48.619	48.619
Denmark	6.46	6.46	6.46	6.46	6.46
Netherlands	2.3368	2.3368	2.3368	2.3368	2.3368
Ireland	0.791	0.791	0.791	0.791	0.791
Spain	166.64	166.64	166.64	166.64	166.64
Sweden	9.46	9.46	9.46	9.46	9.46
Switzerland	1.4361	1.4361	1.4361	1.4361	1.4361
Australia	1.2791	1.2791	1.2791	1.2791	1.2791
Hong Kong	7.756	7.756	7.756	7.756	7.756
Malaysia	3.8025	3.8025	3.8025	3.8025	3.8025
New Zealand	2.2366	2.2366	2.2366	2.2366	2.2366
Saudi Arabia	5.2704	5.2704	5.2704	5.2704	5.2704
Singapore	2.184	2.184	2.184	2.184	2.184

Other Spot Rates

Country	Spot	1 month	3 months	6 months	1 year
Argentina	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000
Brazil	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000
China	8.276	8.276	8.276	8.276	8.276
Egypt	2.2366	2.2366	2.2366	2.2366	2.2366
Greece	2.2366	2.2366	2.2366	2.2366	2.2366
India	37.0748	37.0748	37.0748	37.0748	37.0748
Indonesia	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000
Kuwait	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000

Forward rates quoted high to low are at a discount; rates quoted low to high are at a premium.
*Dollar rates quoted as reciprocals.
For the latest foreign exchange rates call 020 333 3333.
Calls cost 30p per minute (cheaper rate) 40p other areas.

Interest Rates

Country	Rate	Term
UK	6.00%	Discount
France	5.00%	Discount
Germany	3.00%	Discount
Italy	5.00%	Discount
Japan	0.50%	Discount
Spain	5.00%	Discount
Sweden	5.00%	Discount
Switzerland	5.00%	Discount
Australia	5.00%	Discount
Hong Kong	5.00%	Discount
Malaysia	5.00%	Discount
New Zealand	5.00%	Discount
Saudi Arabia	5.00%	Discount
Singapore	5.00%	Discount

Bond Yields

Country	Yield	Term
UK	6.00%	10yr
France	5.00%	10yr
Germany	3.00%	10yr
Italy	5.00%	10yr
Japan	0.50%	10yr
Spain	5.00%	10yr
Sweden	5.00%	10yr
Switzerland	5.00%	10yr
Australia	5.00%	10yr
Hong Kong	5.00%	10yr
Malaysia	5.00%	10yr
New Zealand	5.00%	10yr
Saudi Arabia	5.00%	10yr
Singapore	5.00%	10yr

Money Market Rates

Country	Rate	Term
UK	6.00%	Discount
France	5.00%	Discount
Germany	3.00%	Discount
Italy	5.00%	Discount
Japan	0.50%	Discount
Spain	5.00%	Discount
Sweden	5.00%	Discount
Switzerland	5.00%	Discount
Australia	5.00%	Discount
Hong Kong	5.00%	Discount
Malaysia	5.00%	Discount
New Zealand	5.00%	Discount
Saudi Arabia	5.00%	Discount
Singapore	5.00%	Discount

Tourist Rates

Country	Rate	Term
UK	6.00%	Discount
France	5.00%	Discount
Germany	3.00%	Discount
Italy	5.00%	Discount
Japan	0.50%	Discount
Spain	5.00%	Discount
Sweden	5.00%	Discount
Switzerland	5.00%	Discount
Australia	5.00%	Discount
Hong Kong	5.00%	Discount
Malaysia	5.00%	Discount
New Zealand	5.00%	Discount
Saudi Arabia	5.00%	Discount
Singapore	5.00%	Discount

Life Financial Futures

Contract	Settlement price	High/Low for day	Open	Close
Long Gilt	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10
German Bond	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10
US Bond	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10
Japanese Bond	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10
3M Euro	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10
6M Euro	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10
12M Euro	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10
3M US	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10
6M US	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10
12M US	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10

Life FT-SE Index Option

Series	Settlement price	High/Low for day	Open	Close
Long Gilt	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10
German Bond	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10
US Bond	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10
Japanese Bond	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10
3M Euro	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10
6M Euro	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10
12M Euro	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10
3M US	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10
6M US	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10
12M US	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10

Commodity Indices

Index	Settlement price	High/Low for day	Open	Close
Long Gilt	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10
German Bond	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10
US Bond	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10
Japanese Bond	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10
3M Euro	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10
6M Euro	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10
12M Euro	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10
3M US	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10
6M US	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10
12M US	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10

Industrial Metals

Metal	Settlement price	High/Low for day	Open	Close
Aluminum	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10
Copper	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10
Gold	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10
Lead	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10
Nickel	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10
Platinum	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10
Silver	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10
Zinc	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10

Precious Metals

Metal	Settlement price	High/Low for day	Open	Close
Aluminum	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10
Copper	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10
Gold	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10
Lead	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10
Nickel	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10
Platinum	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10
Silver	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10
Zinc	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10

Agricultural

Commodity	Settlement price	High/Low for day	Open	Close
Aluminum	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10
Copper	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10
Gold	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10
Lead	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10
Nickel	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10
Platinum	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10
Silver	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10
Zinc	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10

Other Softs

Commodity	Settlement price	High/Low for day	Open	Close
Aluminum	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10
Copper	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10
Gold	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10
Lead	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10
Nickel	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10
Platinum	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10
Silver	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10
Zinc	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10

Latest Unit Trust Prices

Unit Trust	Price	Change
Aluminum	106.10	106.10
Copper	106.10	106.10
Gold	106.10	106.10
Lead	106.10	106.10
Nickel	106.10	106.10
Platinum	106.10	106.10
Silver	106.10	106.10
Zinc	106.10	106.10

Energy

Energy	Settlement price	High/Low for day	Open	Close
Aluminum	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10
Copper	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10
Gold	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10
Lead	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10
Nickel	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10
Platinum	106.10	106.10	106.10	106.10
Silver	106.10	106.10	106.10	106

RACING: The return of the sport on level turf brings a call from Doncaster's officials to delay the start of the season until April

Flat's damp start in need of a recharge

GREG WOOD

reports from Doncaster

The sentiment was familiar, but the identity of the messenger was a considerable surprise. "The annual cry is that the Flat season splutters into life," John Sanderson, Doncaster's clerk of the course, said yesterday. "We may have a lot of runners, but it's not a great start to the season. There's nothing magic about March and there may well be a case for moving the Lincoln meeting to April."

If you stood on the terraces of the Tattersalls enclosure and looked out across Town Moor, you would see his point. Or rather, you couldn't. A miserable, clammy fog gripped Doncaster throughout the opening afternoon of the turf campaign, and any similarity between events on the track and those at Ascot and York later this summer seemed sure to be wholly coincidental.

With his comment that a new date for the Lincoln meeting was under consideration, Sanderson was effectively admitting defeat in the face of growing competition from the climax of the jumps season. "As Cheltenham and Aintree have grown, we've got sandwiched and we don't come off too well at the moment," he said. "This meeting is not a launch pad as it used to be. It's racing goes on all the time. Doncaster has got one of the best surfaces in Europe but we don't have any racing in April."

Change in racing is never immediate, and since a formal application to move the meeting

has yet to reach the British Horseracing Board, 1996 is the earliest feasible date ("it could be the Millennium," as Sanderson put it). Among the dampened racegoers who contemplated the apprentice handicap which opened the card, there would surely be few objections, and tradition too is a weak cause. The Lincoln has seen enough changes of venue and conditions in its history to accommodate one more.

Should the switch take place, Sanderson wants the Lincoln fixture to retain its status as the year's first Flat turf card and envisages using the March slot for a jumps meeting. "I wouldn't like to see Doncaster lose the start of the season and this is something that would have to be looked at," he said.

As the fog turned to rain two minutes before the first, even the eager young apprentices circling by the stalls must have felt that anything would be an improvement on the present arrangement. Five minutes later, the punters felt much the same way, as Haya Ya Kefah beat Outstayed Welcome and Golden Arrow to become the first winner of the turf campaign. The starting prices were 33-1, 20-1 and 25-1. When the 20-1 chance Manil went in 30 minutes later, it suddenly looked like being a very long season.

The Brocksley Stakes has been won by a very useful juvenile for the last two seasons, but may now have revealed its former status as a consolation prize for horses who will have no hope of success later in the season. Certainly, it will be a sur-

prise if Indian Spark, yesterday's winner, can stay ahead of his generation beyond Easter.

Indeed, of the 115 runners at Doncaster yesterday, only first island, winner of the Listed Doncaster Mile, appears to have any chance of making an impact in the better races this year. Geoff Wragg's four-year-old produced an impressive turn of foot to settle the contest at a furlong out, and although Michael Hills returned to unsaddle more deeply enmeshed with mud than some of his colleagues at Plumpton yesterday, he was clearly a satisfied rider. "This horse has had a lot of problems," Wragg said, "and we had to operate on a stiffle last year, but since then he's just improved and improved and now we will be thinking about the Queen Anne."

The Queen Anne Stakes - the first race at Royal Ascot. Perhaps, like all the season's early did start here.

Pennekamp injured and out of Cup

Pennekamp, last year's 2,000 Guineas winner, was withdrawn yesterday from next Wednesday's Dubai World Cup. The four-year-old has aggravated the injury he sustained during the 1995 Derby which has kept him off the course since that race last June.

Pennekamp has been in Dubai since January, preparing for an ambitious comeback in the inaugural running of the \$4m contest, the world's richest race, at Nad Al Sheba. But Anthony Stroud, Sheikh Mohammed's racing manager,

said: "The old splint problem has recurred and the extent of the injury is such that he will be unable to make the race. At this stage it is difficult to ascertain how serious it is and what his future may be."

The absence of Pennekamp reduces the field to 11, headed

by the American champion, Cigar. Penitence and Needle Gun will represent Britain, with Halling, Larrocha, Tamayaz and Torment running for the United Arab Emirates.

Lord Relic is the latest horse to drop out of next week's Grand National. The 10-year-old is to be given a rest after being pulled up in last week's Cheltenham Gold Cup. Scotland's only remaining National entry, Emerald Storm, goes on trial for the race at Kelso today. The nine-year-old is a 100-1 chance for Aintree.

HYPERION'S TV TIPS

has an important fitness advantage over many of his rivals. Golden Pound may give him most to do.

4.10: HIGHBORN, was consistent last season, ending up on a winning note. He goes well on an easy surface and is well down in stall four judging by the victory of Little Nogens (stall three) yesterday. Tiler may be the most potent threat.

3.40: LITTLE NOGENS (stall 16), 2. Lady Catherine (stall 20), 3. Passion For Life (stall 1), 4. Secret Vase (stall 15), 5. 18. 19. 20. 21. 22. 23. 24. 25. 26. 27. 28. 29. 30. 31. 32. 33. 34. 35. 36. 37. 38. 39. 40. 41. 42. 43. 44. 45. 46. 47. 48. 49. 50. 51. 52. 53. 54. 55. 56. 57. 58. 59. 60. 61. 62. 63. 64. 65. 66. 67. 68. 69. 70. 71. 72. 73. 74. 75. 76. 77. 78. 79. 80. 81. 82. 83. 84. 85. 86. 87. 88. 89. 90. 91. 92. 93. 94. 95. 96. 97. 98. 99. 100. 101. 102. 103. 104. 105. 106. 107. 108. 109. 110. 111. 112. 113. 114. 115. 116. 117. 118. 119. 120. 121. 122. 123. 124. 125. 126. 127. 128. 129. 130. 131. 132. 133. 134. 135. 136. 137. 138. 139. 140. 141. 142. 143. 144. 145. 146. 147. 148. 149. 150. 151. 152. 153. 154. 155. 156. 157. 158. 159. 160. 161. 162. 163. 164. 165. 166. 167. 168. 169. 170. 171. 172. 173. 174. 175. 176. 177. 178. 179. 180. 181. 182. 183. 184. 185. 186. 187. 188. 189. 190. 191. 192. 193. 194. 195. 196. 197. 198. 199. 200. 201. 202. 203. 204. 205. 206. 207. 208. 209. 210. 211. 212. 213. 214. 215. 216. 217. 218. 219. 220. 221. 222. 223. 224. 225. 226. 227. 228. 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sport

Riley plays the professional to perfection

Golf

ANDY FARRELL
reports from Lisbon

Wayne Riley's image is not what it was. Even John Daly, the original wild man of golf, has labelled him the "mild colonial boy".

That his head was not separated from his torso yesterday as putts bubbled all over the Aroeira greens enabled Riley to record a 65 in the Portuguese

Open. At six under par, he is two shots behind the first round leader, Klas Eriksson of Sweden. "I was what you might call a colourful character," Riley said. "But now you can come and watch me as much as you like and it will be fairly boring. I am more professional."

Playing in the second match of the day, the Australian took advantage of virtually untouched putting surfaces to be out in 30. There again, he saved himself too much trouble with his

broomhanded putter by three times hitting short from shots to within 18 inches of the hole. At the 504-yard 15th, he got within two feet with a driver and 3-iron to set up an eagle.

Then it was a matter of holding together the score, and the head, over the (already trampled) front nine. "It was always in the back of my mind that the front nine was coming up," he said. "The greens are no one's fault, it's just the weather, but they look as if they ran the

Grand National over them. You need a bit of luck."

Riley has a base in Surrey and is a member at Camberley Heath, to which, minus the heather, the treelined Aroeira course is comparable. The pro there, Gary Smith, is his coach and spent time recently with Riley in Australia. Victory at last summer's Scottish Open at Carnoustie, over the likes of Faldo and Montgomerie, came as a relief after 10, sometimes up-toracious, years in Europe.

At his first tournament in Britain, he kicked a ball off a green in full view of the TV cameras and at an event in France his then girlfriend considered the best way to deliver an ice cream was to run across a green in high heels. "I didn't get tired for that one," he said. "When I was young, I was perceived as being hot-headed. But now I am 35 and everybody grows up. For eight years, golf was my profession, but I was more interested in going round

the world having a good time. When I got to 29, I decided it was time to play more seriously. Almost a metre of rain has fallen in the Lisbon area since November, hampering preparations of the course, but it took a delay of more than two hours for early-morning fog to get a new entry in the catalogue of bad weather stories on this year's tour. Several players will have to complete their rounds this morning. Of the later starters, only Cambridge's Rus-

sell Claydon, who matched Ricky Willison's earlier 66, came close to threatening Eriksson's course record of 63. The first thing the 24-year-old does when arriving at a new destination is find a gym for his daily hour's weightlifting. In nearby Caparica, he walked 500 yards from his hotel and found an establishment that caters mainly for the retired. After two years on tour plagued by a wrist tendon problem, Eriksson is stronger and

longer off the tee than ever. "Weightlifting is also psychological," he added. Eriksson has failed to make a cut in four events this year but having bogeyed the fourth, he stood to the tune of nine birdies in the next 11 holes. **PORTUGUESE OPEN (Aroeira, 18 holes) Round 1:** 65 K. Eriksson (SWE); 66 W. Riley (AUS); 67 D. Bormer (GER); 68 J. Hoggan (GBR); 69 J. Coomes (AUS); 70 S. Parry (GBR); 71 J. Hoggan (GBR); 72 J. Hoggan (GBR); 73 J. Hoggan (GBR); 74 J. Hoggan (GBR); 75 J. Hoggan (GBR); 76 J. Hoggan (GBR); 77 J. Hoggan (GBR); 78 J. Hoggan (GBR); 79 J. Hoggan (GBR); 80 J. Hoggan (GBR); 81 J. Hoggan (GBR); 82 J. Hoggan (GBR); 83 J. Hoggan (GBR); 84 J. Hoggan (GBR); 85 J. Hoggan (GBR); 86 J. Hoggan (GBR); 87 J. Hoggan (GBR); 88 J. Hoggan (GBR); 89 J. Hoggan (GBR); 90 J. Hoggan (GBR); 91 J. Hoggan (GBR); 92 J. Hoggan (GBR); 93 J. Hoggan (GBR); 94 J. Hoggan (GBR); 95 J. Hoggan (GBR); 96 J. Hoggan (GBR); 97 J. Hoggan (GBR); 98 J. Hoggan (GBR); 99 J. Hoggan (GBR); 100 J. 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